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THE

DEVIL DOCTOR

HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED ADVENTURES IN

THE CAREER OF THE MYSTERIOUS

DR. FU-MANCHU

BY

SAX ROHMER

SIXTH EDITION

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THE DEVIL DOCTOR

CHAPTER I

A MIDNIGHT SUMMONS

"When did you last hear from Nayland Smith?" asked my visitor.

I paused, my hand on the siphon, reflecting for a moment.

"Two months ago," I said: "he's a poor correspondent and rather

soured, I fancy."

"What--a woman or something?"

"Some affair of that sort. He's such a reticent beggar, I really know

very little about it."

I placed a whisky and soda before the Rev. J. D. Eltham, also sliding

the tobacco jar nearer to his hand. The refined and sensitive face of

the clergyman offered no indication to the truculent character of the

man. His scanty fair hair, already grey over the temples, was silken

and soft-looking: in appearance he was indeed a typical English

churchman; but in China he had been known as "the fighting

missionary," and had fully deserved the title. In fact, this

peaceful-looking gentleman had directly brought about the Boxer

Risings!

"You know," he said in his clerical voice, but meanwhile stuffing

tobacco into an old pipe with fierce energy, "I have often wondered,

Petrie--I have never left off wondering--"

"What?"

"That accursed Chinaman! Since the cellar place beneath the site of

the burnt-out cottage in Dulwich Village--I have wondered more than

ever."

He lighted his pipe and walked to the hearth to throw the match in the

grate.

"You see," he continued, peering across at me in his oddly nervous

way--"one never knows, does one? If I thought that Dr. Fu-Manchu lived;

if I seriously suspected that that stupendous intellect, that wonderful

genius, Petrie, er"--he hesitated characteristically--"survived, I

should feel it my duty--"

"Well?" I said, leaning my elbows on the table and smiling slightly.

"If that Satanic genius were not indeed destroyed, then the peace of

the world might be threatened anew at any moment!"

He was becoming excited, shooting out his jaw in the truculent manner

I knew, and snapping his fingers to emphasize his words; a man

composed of the oddest complexities that ever dwelt beneath a clerical

frock.

"He may have got back to China, doctor!" he cried, and his eyes had

the fighting glint in them. "Could you rest in peace if you thought

that he lived? Should you not fear for your life every time that a

night-call took you out alone? Why, man alive, it is only two years

since he was here amongst us, since we were searching every shadow for

those awful green eyes! What became of his band of assassins--his

stranglers, his dacoits, his damnable poisons and insects and

what-not--the army of creatures--"

He paused, taking a drink.

"You"--he hesitated diffidently--"searched in Egypt with Nayland

Smith, did you not?"

I nodded.

"Contradict me if I am wrong," he continued; "but my impression is

that you were searching for the girl--the girl--Kâramanèh, I think

she was called?"

"Yes," I replied shortly; "but we could find no trace--no trace."

"You--er--were interested?"

"More than I knew," I replied, "until I realized that I had--lost

her."

"I never met Kâramanèh, but from your account, and from others, she

was quite unusually--"

"She was very beautiful," I said, and stood up, for I was anxious to

terminate that phase of the conversation.

Eltham regarded me sympathetically; he knew something of my search

with Nayland Smith for the dark-eyed Eastern girl who had brought

romance into my drab life; he knew that I treasured my memories of her

as I loathed and abhorred those of the fiendish, brilliant Chinese

doctor who had been her master.

Eltham began to pace up and down the rug, his pipe bubbling furiously;

and something in the way he carried his head reminded me momentarily

of Nayland Smith. Certainly, between this pink-faced clergyman, with

his deceptively mild appearance, and the gaunt, bronzed and

steely-eyed Burmese commissioner, there was externally little in

common; but it was some little nervous trick in his carriage that

conjured up through the smoke-haze one distant summer evening when

Smith had paced that very room as Eltham paced it now, when before my

startled eyes he had rung up the curtain upon the savage drama in

which, though I little suspected it then, Fate had cast me for a

leading rôle.

I wondered if Eltham's thoughts ran parallel with mine. My own were

centred upon the unforgettable figure of the murderous Chinaman. These

words, exactly as Smith had used them, seemed once again to sound in

my ears: "Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered,

with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven

skull and long magnetic eyes of the true cat green. Invest him with

all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race accumulated in one

giant intellect, with all the resources of science, past and present,

and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the 'Yellow Peril'

incarnate in one man."

This visit of Eltham's no doubt was responsible for my mood; for this

singular clergyman had played his part in the drama of two years ago.

"I should like to see Smith again," he said suddenly; "it seems a pity

that a man like that should be buried in Burma. Burma makes a mess of

the best of men, doctor. You said he was not married?"

"No," I replied shortly, "and is never likely to be, now."

"Ah, you hinted at something of the kind."

"I know very little of it. Nayland Smith is not the kind of man to

talk much."

"Quite so--quite so! And, you know, doctor, neither am I; but"--he was

growing painfully embarrassed--"it may be your due--I--er--I have a

correspondent, in the interior of China--"

"Well?" I said, watching him in sudden eagerness.

"Well, I would not desire to raise--vain hopes--nor to occasion, shall

I say, empty fears; but--er ... no, doctor!" He flushed like a girl.

"It was wrong of me to open this conversation. Perhaps, when I know

more--will you forget my words, for the time?"

The 'phone bell rang.

"Hullo!" cried Eltham--"hard luck, doctor!"--but I could see that he

welcomed the interruption. "Why!" he added, "it is one o'clock!"

I went to the telephone.

"Is that Dr. Petrie?" inquired a woman's voice.

"Yes; who is speaking?"

"Mrs. Hewett has been taken more seriously ill. Could you come at

once?"

"Certainly," I replied, for Mrs. Hewett was not only a profitable

patient but an estimable lady. "I shall be with you in a quarter of an

hour."

I hung up the receiver.

"Something urgent?" asked Eltham, emptying his pipe.

"Sounds like it. You had better turn in."

"I should much prefer to walk over with you, if it would not be

intruding. Our conversation has ill prepared me for sleep."

"Right!" I said, for I welcomed his company; and three minutes later

we were striding across the deserted common.

A sort of mist floated amongst the trees, seeming in the moonlight

like a veil draped from trunk to trunk, as in silence we passed the

Mound Pond, and struck out for the north side of the common.

I suppose the presence of Eltham and the irritating recollection of

his half-confidence were the responsible factors, but my mind

persistently dwelt upon the subject of Fu-Manchu and the atrocities

which he had committed during his sojourn in England. So actively was

my imagination at work that I felt again the menace which so long had

hung over me; I felt as though that murderous yellow cloud still cast

its shadow upon England. And I found myself longing for the company of

Nayland Smith. I cannot state what was the nature of Eltham's

reflections, but I can guess; for he was as silent as I.

It was with a conscious effort that I shook myself out of this

morbidly reflective mood, on finding that we had crossed the common

and were come to the abode of my patient.

"I shall take a little walk," announced Eltham; "for I gather that you

don't expect to be detained long? I shall never be out of sight of the

door, of course."

"Very well," I replied, and ran up the steps.

There were no lights to be seen in any of the windows, which

circumstance rather surprised me, as my patient occupied, or had

occupied when last I had visited her, a first-floor bedroom in the

front of the house. My knocking and ringing produced no response for

three or four minutes; then, as I persisted, a scantily clothed and

half-awake maid-servant unbarred the door and stared at me stupidly in

the moonlight.

"Mrs. Hewett requires me?" I asked abruptly.

The girl stared more stupidly than ever.

"No, sir," she said: "she don't, sir; she's fast asleep!"

"But some one 'phoned me!" I insisted, rather irritably, I fear.

"Not from here, sir," declared the now wide-eyed girl. "We haven't got

a telephone, sir."

For a few moments I stood there, staring as foolishly as she; then

abruptly I turned and descended the steps. At the gate I stood looking

up and down the road. The houses were all in darkness. What could be

the meaning of the mysterious summons? I had made no mistake

respecting the name of my patient; it had been twice repeated over the

telephone; yet that the call had not emanated from Mrs. Hewett's house

was now palpably evident. Days had been when I should have regarded

the episode as preluding some outrage, but to-night I felt more

disposed to ascribe it to a silly practical joke.

Eltham walked up briskly.

"You're in demand to-night, doctor," he said. "A young person called

for you almost directly you had left your house, and, learning where

you were gone, followed you."

"Indeed!" I said, a trifle incredulously. "There are plenty of other

doctors if the case is an urgent one."

"She may have thought it would save time as you were actually up and

dressed," explained Eltham; "and the house is quite near to here, I

understand."

I looked at him a little blankly. Was this another effort of the

unknown jester?

"I have been fooled once," I said. "That 'phone call was a hoax--"

"But I feel certain," declared Eltham earnestly, "that this is

genuine! The poor girl was dreadfully agitated; her master has broken

his leg and is lying helpless: number 280 Rectory Grove."

"Where is the girl?" I asked sharply.

"She ran back directly she had given me her message."

"Was she a servant?"

"I should imagine so: French, I think. But she was so wrapped up I had

little more than a glimpse of her. I am sorry to hear that some one

has played a silly joke on you, but believe me"--he was very

earnest--"this is no jest. The poor girl could scarcely speak for

sobs. She mistook me for you, of course."

"Oh!" said I grimly; "well, I suppose I must go. Broken leg, you

said?--and my surgical bag, splints and so forth, are at home!"

"My dear Petrie!" cried Eltham, in his enthusiastic way, "you no doubt

can do something to alleviate the poor man's suffering immediately. I

will run back to your rooms for the bag and rejoin you at 280 Rectory

Grove."

"It's awfully good of you, Eltham--"

He held up his hand.

"The call of suffering humanity, Petrie, is one which I may no more

refuse to hear than you."

I made no further protest after that, for his point of view was

evident and his determination adamantine, but told him where he would

find the bag and once more set out across the moon-bright common, he

pursuing a westerly direction and I going east.

Some three hundred yards I had gone, I suppose, and my brain had been

very active the while, when something occurred to me which placed a

new complexion upon this second summons. I thought of the falsity of

the first, of the improbability of even the most hardened practical

joker practising his wiles at one o'clock in the morning. I thought of

our recent conversation; above all I thought of the girl who had

delivered the message to Eltham, the girl whom he had described as a

French maid--whose personal charm had so completely enlisted his

sympathies. Now, to this train of thought came a new one, and, adding

it, my suspicion became almost a certainty.

I remembered (as, knowing the district, I should have remembered

before) that there was no number 280 Rectory Grove.

Pulling up sharply, I stood looking about me. Not a living soul was in

sight; not even a policeman. Where the lamps marked the main paths

across the common nothing moved; in the shadows about me nothing

stirred. But something stirred within me--a warning voice which for

long had lain dormant.

What was afoot?

A breeze caressed the leaves overhead, breaking the silence with

mysterious whisperings. Some portentous truth was seeking for

admittance to my brain. I strove to reassure myself, but the sense of

impending evil and of mystery became heavier. At last I could combat

my strange fears no longer. I turned and began to run towards the

south side of the common--towards my rooms--and after Eltham.

I had hoped to head him off, but came upon no sign of him. An

all-night tramcar passed at the moment that I reached the high-road,

and as I ran around behind it I saw that my windows were lighted and

that there was a light in the hall.

My key was yet in the lock when my housekeeper opened the door.

"There's a gentleman just come, doctor," she began.

I thrust past her and raced up the stairs to my study.

Standing by the writing-table was a tall thin man, his gaunt face

brown as a coffee-berry and his steely grey eyes fixed upon me. My

heart gave a great leap--and seemed to stand still.

It was Nayland Smith!

"Smith!" I cried. "Smith, old man, by God, I'm glad to see you!"

He wrung my hand hard, looking at me with his searching eyes; but

there was little enough of gladness in his face. He was altogether

greyer than when last I had seen him--greyer and sterner.

"Where is Eltham?" I asked.

Smith started back as though I had struck him.

"Eltham!" he whispered--"\_Eltham\_! is Eltham here?"

"I left him ten minutes ago on the common."

Smith dashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand, and his

eyes gleamed almost wildly.

"My God, Petrie!" he said, "am I fated \_always\_ to come too late?"

My dreadful fears in that instant were confirmed. I seemed to feel my

legs totter beneath me.

"Smith, you don't mean--"

"I do, Petrie!" His voice sounded very far away. "Fu-Manchu is here;

and Eltham, God help him ... is his first victim!"

CHAPTER II

ELTHAM VANISHES

Smith went racing down the stairs like a man possessed. Heavy with

such a foreboding of calamity as I had not known for two years, I

followed him--along the hall and out into the road. The very peace and

beauty of the night in some way increased my mental agitation. The sky

was lighted almost tropically with such a blaze of stars as I could

not recall to have seen since, my futile search concluded, I had left

Egypt. The glory of the moonlight yellowed the lamps speckled across

the expanse of the common. The night was as still as night can ever be

in London. The dimming pulse of a cab or car alone disturbed the

quietude.

With a quick glance to right and left, Smith ran across on to the

common, and, leaving the door wide open behind me, I followed. The

path which Eltham had pursued terminated almost opposite to my house.

One's gaze might follow it, white and empty, for several hundred yards

past the pond, and farther, until it became overshadowed and was lost

amid a clump of trees.

I came up with Smith, and side by side we ran on, whilst pantingly I

told my tale.

"It was a trick to get you away from him!" cried Smith. "They meant no

doubt to make some attempt at your house, but, as he came out with

you, an alternative plan--"

Abreast of the pond, my companion slowed down, and finally stopped.

"Where did you last see Eltham?" he asked, rapidly.

I took his arm, turning him slightly to the right, and pointed across

the moon-bathed common.

"You see that clump of bushes on the other side of the road?" I said.

"There's a path to the left of it. I took that path and he took this.

We parted at the point where they meet--"

Smith walked right down to the edge of the water and peered about over

the surface.

What he hoped to find there I could not imagine. Whatever it had been

he was disappointed, and he turned to me again, frowning perplexedly,

and tugging at the lobe of his left ear, an old trick which reminded

me of gruesome things we had lived through in the past.

"Come on," he jerked. "It may be amongst the trees."

From the tone of his voice I knew that he was tensed up nervously, and

his mood but added to the apprehension of my own.

"\_What\_ may be amongst the trees, Smith?" I asked.

He walked on.

"God knows, Petrie; but I fear--"

Behind us, along the high-road, a tramcar went rocking by, doubtless

bearing a few belated workers homeward. The stark incongruity of the

thing was appalling. How little those weary toilers, hemmed about with

the commonplace, suspected that almost within sight from the car

windows, amid prosy benches, iron railings, and unromantic, flickering

lamps, two fellow-men moved upon the border of a horror-land!

Beneath the trees a shadow carpet lay, its edges tropically sharp; and

fully ten yards from the first of the group, we two, hatless both, and

sharing a common dread, paused for a moment and listened.

The car had stopped at the farther extremity of the common, and now

with a moan that grew to a shriek was rolling on its way again. We

stood and listened until silence reclaimed the night. Not a footstep

could be heard. Then slowly we walked on. At the edge of the little

coppice we stopped again abruptly.

Smith turned and thrust his pistol into my hand. A white ray of light

pierced the shadows; my companion carried an electric torch. But no

trace of Eltham was discoverable.

There had been a heavy shower of rain during the evening, just before

sunset, and although the open paths were dry again, under the trees

the ground was still moist. Ten yards within the coppice we came upon

tracks--the tracks of one running, as the deep imprints of the toes

indicated.

Abruptly the tracks terminated; others, softer, joined them, two sets

converging from left and right. There was a confused patch, trailing

off to the west; then this became indistinct, and was finally lost,

upon the hard ground outside the group.

For perhaps a minute, or more, we ran about from tree to tree, and

from bush to bush, searching like hounds for a scent, and fearful of

what we might find. We found nothing; and fully in the moonlight we

stood facing one another. The night was profoundly still.

Nayland Smith stepped back into the shadows, and began slowly to turn

his head from left to right, taking in the entire visible expanse of

the common. Towards a point where the road bisected it he stared

intently. Then, with a bound, he set off!

"Come on, Petrie!" he cried. "There they are!"

Vaulting a railing he went away over a field like a madman. Recovering

from the shock of surprise, I followed him, but he was well ahead of

me, and making for some vaguely seen objects moving against the lights

of the roadway.

Another railing was vaulted, and the corner of a second, triangular

grass patch crossed at a hot sprint. We were twenty yards from the

road when the sound of a starting motor broke the silence. We gained

the gravelled footpath only to see the tail-light of the car dwindling

to the north!

Smith leant dizzily against a tree.

"Eltham is in that car!" he gasped. "Just God! are we to stand here

and see him taken away to--?"

He beat his fist upon the tree, in a sort of tragic despair. The

nearest cab-rank was no great distance away, but, excluding the

possibility of no cab being there, it might, for all practicable

purposes, as well have been a mile off.

The beat of the retreating motor was scarcely audible; the lights

might but just be distinguished. Then, coming in an opposite

direction, appeared the headlamp of another car, of a car that raced

nearer and nearer to us, so that, within a few seconds of its first

appearance, we found ourselves bathed in the beam of its headlights.

Smith bounded out into the road, and stood, a weird silhouette, with

upraised arms, fully in its course!

The brakes were applied hurriedly. It was a big limousine, and its

driver swerved perilously in avoiding Smith and nearly ran into me.

But, the breathless moment past, the car was pulled up, head on to the

railings; and a man in evening clothes was demanding excitedly what

had happened. Smith, a hatless, dishevelled figure, stepped up to the

door.

"My name is Nayland Smith," he said rapidly--"Burmese Commissioner."

He snatched a letter from his pocket and thrust it into the hands of

the bewildered man. "Read that. It is signed by another

Commissioner--the Commissioner of Police."

With amazement written all over him, the other obeyed.

"You see," continued my friend tersely, "it is \_carte blanche\_. I wish

to commandeer your car, sir, on a matter of life and death!"

The other returned the letter.

"Allow me to offer it!" he said, descending. "My man will take your

orders. I can finish my journey by cab. I am--"

But Smith did not wait to learn whom he might be.

"Quick!" he cried to the stupefied chauffeur. "You passed a car a

minute ago--yonder. Can you overtake it?"

"I can try, sir, if I don't lose her track."

Smith leapt in, pulling me after him.

"Do it!" he snapped. "There are no speed limits for me. Thanks! Good

night, sir!"

We were off! The car swung around and the chase commenced.

One last glimpse I had of the man we had dispossessed, standing alone

by the roadside, and at ever-increasing speed, we leapt away in the

track of Eltham's captors.

Smith was too highly excited for ordinary conversation, but he threw

out short, staccato remarks.

"I have followed Fu-Manchu from Hong-Kong," he jerked. "Lost him at

Suez. He got here a boat ahead of me. Eltham has been corresponding

with some mandarin up-country. Knew that. Came straight to you. Only

got in this evening. He--Fu-Manchu--has been sent here to get Eltham.

My God! and he has him! He will question him! The interior of China--a

seething pot, Petrie! They had to stop the leakage of information.

\_He\_ is here for that."

The car pulled up with a jerk that pitched me out of my seat, and the

chauffeur leapt to the road and ran ahead. Smith was out in a trice,

as the man, who had run up to a constable, came racing back.

"Jump in, sir--jump in!" he cried, his eyes bright with the lust of

the chase; "they are making for Battersea!"

And we were off again.

Through the empty streets we roared on. A place of gasometers and

desolate waste lots slipped behind and we were in a narrow way where

gates of yards and a few lowly houses faced upon a prospect of high

blank wall.

"Thames on our right," said Smith, peering ahead. "His rathole is by

the river as usual. \_Hi\_!"--he grabbed up the speaking-tube--"Stop!

Stop!"

The limousine swung into the narrow sidewalk, and pulled up close by a

yard gate. I, too, had seen our quarry--a long, low-bodied car,

showing no inside lights. It had turned the next corner, where a

street lamp shone greenly not a hundred yards ahead.

Smith leapt out, and I followed him.

"That must be a cul-de-sac," he said, and turned to the eager-eyed

chauffeur. "Run back to that last turning," he ordered, "and wait

there, out of sight. Bring the car up when you hear a police-whistle."

The man looked disappointed, but did not question the order. As he

began to back away, Smith grasped me by the arm and drew me forward.

"We must get to that corner," he said, "and see where the car stands,

without showing ourselves."

CHAPTER III

THE WIRE JACKET

I suppose we were not more than a dozen paces from the lamp when we

heard the thudding of the motor. The car was backing out!

It was a desperate moment, for it seemed that we could not fail to be

discovered. Nayland Smith began to look about him, feverishly, for a

hiding place, a quest which I seconded with equal anxiety. And Fate

was kind to us--doubly kind as after events revealed. A wooden gate

broke the expanse of wall hard by upon the right, and, as the result

of some recent accident, a ragged gap had been torn in the panels

close to the top.

The chain of the padlock hung loosely; and in a second Smith was up,

with his foot in this as in a stirrup. He threw his arm over the top

and drew himself upright. A second later he was astride the broken

gate.

"Up you come, Petrie!" he said, and reached down his hand to aid me.

I got my foot into the loop of chain, grasped at a projection in the

gate-post, and found myself up.

"There is a crossbar, on this side to stand on," said Smith.

He climbed over and vanished in the darkness. I was still astride the

broken gate when the car turned the corner, slowly, for there was

scanty room; but I was standing upon the bar on the inside and had my

head below the gap ere the driver could possibly have seen me.

"Stay where you are until he passes," hissed my companion, below.

"There is a row of kegs under you."

The sound of the motor passing outside grew loud--louder--then began

to die away. I felt about with my left foot, discerned the top of a

keg, and dropped, panting, beside Smith.

"Phew!" I said--"that was a close thing! Smith--how do we know--?"

"That we have followed the right car?" he interrupted. "Ask yourself

the question: what would any ordinary man be doing motoring in a place

like this at two o'clock in the morning?"

"You are right, Smith," I agreed. "Shall we get out again?"

"Not yet. I have an idea. Look yonder."

He grasped my arm, turning me in the desired direction.

Beyond a great expanse of unbroken darkness a ray of moonlight slanted

into the place wherein we stood, spilling its cold radiance upon rows

of kegs.

"That's another door," continued my friend. I now began dimly to

perceive him beside me. "If my calculations are not entirely wrong, it

opens on a wharf gate--"

A steam siren hooted dismally, apparently from quite close at hand.

"I'm right!" snapped Smith. "That turning leads down to the gate. Come

on, Petrie!"

He directed the light of the electric torch upon a narrow path through

the ranks of casks, and led the way to the farther door. A good two

feet of moonlight showed along the top. I heard Smith straining;

then--

"These kegs are all loaded with grease," he said, "and I want to

reconnoitre over that door."

"I am leaning on a crate which seems easy to move," I reported. "Yes,

it's empty. Lend a hand."

We grasped the empty crate, and, between us, set it up on a solid

pedestal of casks. Then Smith mounted to this observation platform and

I scrambled up beside him, and looked down upon the lane outside.

It terminated as Smith had foreseen at a wharf gate some six feet to

the right of our post. Piled up in the lane beneath us, against the

warehouse door, was a stack of empty casks. Beyond, over the way, was

a kind of ramshackle building that had possibly been a dwelling-house

at some time. Bills were stuck in the ground-floor windows indicating

that the three floors were to let as offices; so much was discernible

in that reflected moonlight.

I could hear the tide lapping upon the wharf, could feel the chill

from the near river and hear the vague noises which, night nor day,

never cease upon the great commercial waterway.

"Down!" whispered Smith. "Make no noise! I suspected it. They heard

the car following!"

I obeyed, clutching at him for support; for I was suddenly dizzy, and

my heart was leaping wildly--furiously.

"You saw her?" he whispered.

Saw her! Yes, I had seen her! And my poor dream-world was toppling

about me, its cities ashes and its fairness dust.

Peering from the window, her great eyes wondrous in the moonlight and

her red lips parted, hair gleaming like burnished foam and her anxious

gaze set upon the corner of the lane--was Kâramanèh ... Kâramanèh

whom once we had rescued from the house of this fiendish Chinese

doctor; Kâramanèh who had been our ally, in fruitless quest of

whom,--when, too late, I realized how empty my life was become--I had

wasted what little of the world's goods I possessed:--Kâramanèh!

"Poor old Petrie," murmured Smith. "I knew, but I hadn't the

heart--\_He\_ has her again--God knows by what chains he holds her. But

she's only a woman, old boy, and women are very much alike--very much

alike from Charing Cross to Pagoda Road."

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a moment; I am ashamed to

confess that I was trembling; then, clenching my teeth with that

mechanical physical effort which often accompanies a mental one, I

swallowed the bitter draught of Nayland Smith's philosophy. He was

raising himself, to peer, cautiously, over the top of the door. I did

likewise.

The window from which the girl had looked was nearly on a level with

our eyes, and as I raised my head above the woodwork, I quite

distinctly saw her go out of the room. The door, as she opened it,

admitted a dull light, against which her figure showed silhouetted for

a moment. Then the door was reclosed.

"We must risk the other windows," rapped Smith.

Before I had grasped the nature of his plan, he was over and had

dropped almost noiselessly upon the casks outside. Again I followed

his lead.

"You are not going to attempt anything, single-handed--against \_him\_?"

I asked.

"Petrie--Eltham is in that house. He has been brought here to be put

to the question, in the mediæval, and Chinese, sense! Is there time to

summon assistance?"

I shuddered. This had been in my mind, certainly, but so expressed it

was definitely horrible--revolting, yet stimulating.

"You have the pistol," added Smith; "follow closely, and quietly."

He walked across the tops of the casks and leapt down, pointing to

that nearest to the closed door of the house. I helped him place it

under the open window. A second we set beside it, and, not without

some noise, got a third on top.

Smith mounted.

His jaw muscles were very prominent and his eyes shone like steel; but

he was as cool as though he were about to enter a theatre and not the

den of the most stupendous genius who ever worked for evil. I would

forgive any man who, knowing Dr. Fu-Manchu, feared him; I feared him

myself--feared him as one fears a scorpion; but when Nayland Smith

hauled himself up on to the wooden ledge above the door and swung

thence into the darkened room, I followed and was in close upon his

heels. But I admired him, for he had every ampère of his

self-possession in hand; my own case was different.

He spoke close to my ear.

"Is your hand steady? We may have to shoot."

I thought of Kâramanèh, of lovely dark-eyed Kâramanèh, whom this

wonderful, evil product of secret China had stolen from me--for so I

now adjudged it.

"Rely upon me!" I said grimly. "I--"

The words ceased--frozen on my tongue.

There are things that one seeks to forget, but it is my lot often to

remember the sound which at that moment literally struck me rigid with

horror. Yet it was only a groan; but, merciful God! I pray that it may

never be my lot to listen to such a groan again.

Smith drew a sibilant breath.

"It's Eltham!" he whispered hoarsely, "they're torturing--"

"No, no!" screamed a woman's voice--a voice that thrilled me anew,

but with another emotion. "Not that, not--"

I distinctly heard the sound of a blow. Followed a sort of vague

scuffling. A door somewhere at the back of the house opened--and shut

again. Some one was coming along the passage towards us!

"Stand back!" Smith's voice was low, but perfectly steady. "Leave it

to me!"

Nearer came the footsteps and nearer. I could hear suppressed sobs.

The door opened, admitting again the faint light--and Kâramanèh came

in. The place was quite unfurnished, offering no possibility of

hiding; but to hide was unnecessary.

Her slim figure had not crossed the threshold ere Smith had his arm

about the girl's waist and one hand clapped to her mouth. A stifled

gasp she uttered, and he lifted her into the room.

"Shut the door, Petrie," he directed.

I stepped forward and closed the door. A faint perfume stole to my

nostrils--a vague, elusive breath of the East, reminiscent of strange

days that, now, seemed to belong to a remote past. Kâramanèh! that

faint, indefinable perfume was part of her dainty personality; it may

appear absurd--impossible--but many and many a time I had dreamt of

it.

"In my breast pocket," rapped Smith; "the light."

I bent over the girl as he held her. She was quite still, but I could

have wished that I had had more certain mastery of myself. I took the

torch from Smith's pocket and, mechanically, directed it upon the

captive.

She was dressed very plainly, wearing a simple blue skirt, and white

blouse. It was easy to divine that it was she whom Eltham had mistaken

for a French maid. A brooch set with a ruby was pinned at the point

where the blouse opened--gleaming fierily and harshly against the soft

skin. Her face was pale and her eyes wide with fear.

"There is some cord in my right-hand pocket," said Smith. "I came

provided. Tie her wrists."

I obeyed him, silently. The girl offered no resistance, but I think I

never essayed a less congenial task than that of binding her white

wrists. The jewelled fingers lay quite listlessly in my own.

"Make a good job of it!" rapped Smith significantly.

A flush rose to my cheeks, for I knew well enough what he meant.

"She is fastened," I said, and I turned the ray of the torch upon her

again.

Smith removed his hand from her mouth but did not relax his grip of

her. She looked up at me with eyes in which I could have sworn there

was no recognition. But a flush momentarily swept over her face, and

left it pale again.

"We shall have to--gag her--"

"Smith, I can't do it!"

The girl's eyes filled with tears and she looked up at my companion

pitifully.

"Please don't be cruel to me," she whispered, with that soft accent

which always played havoc with my composure. "Every one--every one--is

cruel to me. I will promise--indeed I will swear, to be quiet. Oh,

believe me, if you can save him I will do nothing to hinder you." Her

beautiful head drooped. "Have some pity for me as well."

"Kâramanèh," I said, "we would have believed you once. We cannot now."

She started violently.

"You know my name!" Her voice was barely audible. "Yet I have never

seen you in my life--"

"See if the door locks," interrupted Smith harshly.

Dazed by the apparent sincerity in the voice of our lovely

captive--vacant from wonder of it all--I opened the door, felt for,

and found, a key.

We left Kâramanèh crouching against the wall; her great eyes were

turned towards me fascinatedly. Smith locked the door with much care.

We began a tip-toed progress along the dimly-lighted passage.

From beneath a door on the left, and near the end, a brighter light

shone. Beyond that again was another door. A voice was speaking in the

lighted room; yet I could have sworn that Kâramanèh had come, not from

there but from the room beyond--from the far end of the passage.

But the voice!--who, having once heard it, could ever mistake that

singular voice, alternately guttural and sibilant.

Dr. Fu-Manchu was speaking!

"I have asked you," came with ever-increasing clearness (Smith had

begun to turn the knob), "to reveal to me the name of your

correspondent in Nan-Yang. I have suggested that he may be the

Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat, but you have declined to confirm me. Yet I know"

(Smith had the door open a good three inches and was peering in) "that

some official, some high official, is a traitor. Am I to resort again

to \_the question\_ to learn his name?"

Ice seemed to enter my veins at the unseen inquisitor's intonation of

the words "\_the question\_." This was the twentieth century; yet there,

in that damnable room....

Smith threw the door open.

Through a sort of haze, born mostly of horror, but not entirely, I saw

Eltham, stripped to the waist and tied, with his arms upstretched, to

a rafter in the ancient ceiling. A Chinaman, who wore a slop-shop blue

suit and who held an open knife in his hand, stood beside him. Eltham

was ghastly white. The appearance of his chest puzzled me momentarily,

then I realized that a sort of \_tourniquet\_ of wire-netting was

screwed so tightly about him that the flesh swelled out in knobs

through the mesh. There was blood--

"God in heaven!" screamed Smith frenziedly, "\_they have the

wire-jacket on him!\_ Shoot down that damned Chinaman, Petrie! Shoot!

Shoot!"

Lithely as a cat the man with the knife leapt around--but I raised the

Browning, and deliberately--with a cool deliberation that came to me

suddenly--shot him through the head. I saw his oblique eyes turn up to

the whites; I saw the mark squarely between his brows; and with no word

nor cry he sank to his knees and toppled forward with one yellow hand

beneath him and one outstretched, clutching--clutching--convulsively.

His pigtail came unfastened and began to uncoil, slowly, like a snake.

I handed the pistol to Smith; I was perfectly cool, now; and I leapt

forward, took up the bloody knife from the floor and cut Eltham's

lashings. He sank into my arms.

"Praise God," he murmured weakly. "He is more merciful to me than

perhaps I deserve. Unscrew ... the jacket, Petrie ... I think ... I was

very near to ... weakening. Praise the good God, who ... gave me ...

fortitude...."

I got the screw of the accursed thing loosened, but the act of

removing the jacket was too agonizing for Eltham--man of iron though

he was. I laid him swooning on the floor.

"Where is Fu-Manchu?"

Nayland Smith, from just within the door, threw out the query in a

tone of stark amaze. I stood up--I could do nothing more for the poor

victim at the moment--and looked about me.

The room was innocent of furniture, save for heaps of rubbish on the

floor, and a tin oil-lamp hung on the wall. The dead Chinaman lay

close beside Smith. There was no second door, the one window was

barred and from this room we had heard the voice, the unmistakable,

unforgettable voice, of Fu-Manchu.

\_But Dr. Fu-Manchu was not there!\_

Neither of us could accept the fact for a moment; we stood there,

looking from the dead man to the tortured man who had only swooned,

in a state of helpless incredulity.

Then the explanation flashed upon us both, simultaneously, and with a

cry of baffled rage Smith leapt along the passage to the second door.

It was wide open. I stood at his elbow when he swept its emptiness

with the ray of his pocket-lamp.

There was a speaking-tube fixed between the two rooms!

Smith literally ground his teeth.

"Yet, Petrie," he said, "we have learnt something. Fu-Manchu had

evidently promised Eltham his life if he would divulge the name of his

correspondent. He meant to keep his word; it is a sidelight on his

character."

"How so?"

"Eltham has never seen Dr. Fu-Manchu, but Eltham knows certain parts

of China better than you know the Strand. Probably, if he saw

Fu-Manchu, he would recognize him for whom he really is, and this, it

seems, the Doctor is anxious to avoid."

We ran back to where we had left Kâramanèh.

The room was empty!

"Defeated, Petrie!" said Smith bitterly. "The Yellow Devil is loosed

on London again!"

He leant from the window and the skirl of a police whistle split the

stillness of the night.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRY OF A NIGHTHAWK

Such were the episodes that marked the coming of Dr. Fu-Manchu to

London, that awakened fears long dormant and reopened old wounds--nay,

poured poison into them. I strove desperately, by close attention to

my professional duties, to banish the very memory of Kâramanèh from my

mind; desperately, but how vainly! Peace was for me no more, joy was

gone from the world, and only mockery remained as my portion.

Poor Eltham we had placed in a nursing establishment, where his

indescribable hurts could be properly tended; and his uncomplaining

fortitude not infrequently made me thoroughly ashamed of myself.

Needless to say, Smith had made such other arrangements as were

necessary to safeguard the injured man, and these proved so successful

that the malignant being whose plans they thwarted abandoned his

designs upon the heroic clergyman and directed his attention

elsewhere, as I must now proceed to relate.

Dusk always brought with it a cloud of apprehension, for darkness must

ever be the ally of crime; and it was one night, long after the clocks

had struck the mystic hour, "when churchyards yawn," that the hand of

Dr. Fu-Manchu again stretched out to grasp a victim. I was dismissing

a chance patient.

"Good night, Dr. Petrie," he said.

"Good night, Mr. Forsyth," I replied; and having conducted my late

visitor to the door, I closed and bolted it, switched off the light,

and went upstairs.

My patient was chief officer of one of the P. and O. boats. He had cut

his hand rather badly on the homeward run, and signs of poisoning

having developed, had called to have the wound treated, apologizing

for troubling me at so late an hour, but explaining that he had only

just come from the docks. The hall clock announced the hour of one as

I ascended the stairs. I found myself wondering what there was in Mr.

Forsyth's appearance which excited some vague and elusive memory.

Coming to the top floor, I opened the door of a front bedroom and was

surprised to find the interior in darkness.

"Smith!" I called.

"Come here and watch!" was the terse response.

Nayland Smith was sitting in the dark at the open window and peering

out across the common. Even as I saw him, a dim silhouette, I could

detect that tensity in his attitude which told of high-strung nerves.

I joined him.

"What is it?" I asked curiously.

"I don't know. Watch that clump of elms."

His masterful voice had the dry tone in it betokening excitement. I

leaned on the ledge beside him and looked out. The blaze of stars

almost compensated for the absence of the moon, and the night had a

quality of stillness that made for awe. This was a tropical summer,

and the common, with its dancing lights dotted irregularly about it,

had an unfamiliar look to-night. The clump of nine elms showed as a

dense and irregular mass, lacking detail.

Such moods as that which now claimed my friend are magnetic. I had no

thought of the night's beauty, for it only served to remind me that

somewhere amid London's millions was lurking an uncanny being, whose

life was a mystery, whose very existence was a scientific miracle.

"Where's your patient?" rapped Smith.

His abrupt query diverted my thoughts into a new channel. No footstep

disturbed the silence of the high-road. Where \_was\_ my patient?

I craned from the window. Smith grabbed my arm.

"Don't lean out," he said.

I drew back, glancing at him surprisedly.

"For Heaven's sake, why not?"

"I'll tell you presently, Petrie. Did you see him?"

"I did, and I can't make out what he is doing. He seems to have

remained standing at the gate for some reason."

"He has seen it!" snapped Smith. "Watch those elms."

His hand remained upon my arm, gripping it nervously. Shall I say that

I was surprised? I can say it with truth. But I shall add that I was

thrilled, eerily; for this subdued excitement and alert watching of

Smith's could only mean one thing:

Fu-Manchu!

And that was enough to set me watching as keenly as he; to set me

listening, not only for sounds outside the house but for sounds

within. Doubts, suspicions, dreads heaped themselves up in my mind.

Why was Forsyth standing there at the gate? I had never seen him

before, to my knowledge, yet there was something oddly reminiscent

about the man. Could it be that his visit formed part of a plot? Yet

his wound had been genuine enough. Thus my mind worked, feverishly;

such was the effect of an unspoken thought--Fu-Manchu.

Nayland Smith's grip tightened on my arm.

"There it is again, Petrie!" he whispered. "Look, look!"

His words were wholly unnecessary. I, too, had seen it; a wonderful

and uncanny sight. Out of the darkness under the elms, low down upon

the ground, grew a vaporous blue light. It flared up, elfinish, then

began to ascend. Like an igneous phantom, a witch flame, it rose,

higher, higher, higher, to what I adjudged to be some twelve feet or

more from the ground. Then, high in the air, it died away again as it

had come!

"For God's sake, Smith, what was it?"

"Don't ask me, Petrie. I have seen it twice. We--"

He paused. Rapid footsteps sounded below. Over Smith's shoulder I saw

Forsyth cross the road, climb the low rail, and set out across the

common.

Smith sprang impetuously to his feet.

"We must stop him!" he said hoarsely; then, clapping a hand to my

mouth as I was about to call out--"Not a sound, Petrie!"

He ran out of the room and went blundering downstairs in the dark,

crying:

"Out through the garden--the side entrance!"

I overtook him as he threw wide the door of my dispensing room.

Through he ran and opened the door at the other end. I followed him

out, closing it behind me. The smell from some tobacco plants in a

neighbouring flower-bed was faintly perceptible; no breeze stirred;

and in the great silence I could hear Smith, in front of me, tugging

at the bolt of the gate.

Then he had it open, and I stepped out, close on his heels, and left

the door ajar.

"We must not appear to have come from your house," explained Smith

rapidly. "I will go along to the high-road and cross to the common a

hundred yards up, where there is a pathway, as though homeward bound

to the north side. Give me half a minute's start, then you proceed in

an opposite direction and cross from the corner of the next road.

Directly you are out of the light of the street lamps, get over the

rails and run for the elms!"

He thrust a pistol into my hand and was off.

While he had been with me, speaking in that incisive impetuous way of

his, his dark face close to mine, and his eyes gleaming like steel, I

had been at one with him in his feverish mood, but now, when I stood

alone in that staid and respectable by-way, holding a loaded pistol in

my hand, the whole thing became utterly unreal.

It was in an odd frame of mind that I walked to the next corner, as

directed, for I was thinking, not of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the great and evil

man who dreamed of Europe and America under Chinese rule, not of

Nayland Smith, who alone stood between the Chinaman and the

realization of his monstrous schemes, not even of Kâramanèh, the slave

girl, whose glorious beauty was a weapon of might in Fu-Manchu's

hand, but of what impression I must have made upon a patient had I

encountered one then.

Such were my ideas up to the moment that I crossed to the common and

vaulted into the field on my right. As I began to run toward the elms

I found myself wondering what it was all about, and for what we were

come. Fifty yards west of the trees it occurred to me that if Smith

had counted on cutting Forsyth off we were too late, for it appeared

to me that he must already be in the coppice.

I was right. Twenty paces more I ran, and ahead of me, from the elms,

came a sound. Clearly it came through the still air--the eerie hoot of

a nighthawk. I could not recall ever to have heard the cry of that

bird on the common before, but oddly enough I attached little

significance to it until, in the ensuing instant, a most dreadful

scream--a scream in which fear and loathing and anger were hideously

blended--thrilled me with horror.

After that I have no recollection of anything until I found myself

standing by the southernmost elm.

"Smith!" I cried breathlessly. "Smith! my God! where are you?"

As if in answer to my cry came an indescribable sound, a mingled

sobbing and choking. Out from the shadows staggered a ghastly

figure--that of a man whose face appeared to be \_streaked\_. His eyes

glared at me madly, and he moved the air with his hands like one blind

and insane with fear.

I started back; words died upon my tongue. The figure reeled, and the

man fell babbling and sobbing at my very feet.

Inert I stood, looking down at him. He writhed a moment--and was

still. The silence again became perfect. Then, from somewhere beyond

the elms, Nayland Smith appeared. I did not move. Even when he stood

beside me, I merely stared at him fatuously.

"I let him walk to his death, Petrie," I heard dimly. "God forgive

me--God forgive me!"

The words aroused me.

"Smith"--my voice came as a whisper--"for one awful moment I

thought--"

"So did some one else," he rapped. "Our poor sailor has met the end

designed for \_me\_, Petrie!"

At that I realized two things: I knew why Forsyth's face had struck me

as being familiar in some puzzling way, and I knew why Forsyth now lay

dead upon the grass. Save that he was a fair man and wore a slight

moustache, he was, in features and build, the double of Nayland Smith!

CHAPTER V

THE NET

We raised the poor victim and turned him over on his back. I dropped

upon my knees, and with unsteady fingers began to strike a match. A

slight breeze was arising and sighing gently through the elms, but,

screened by my hands, the flame of the match took life. It illuminated

wanly the sun-baked face of Nayland Smith, his eyes gleaming with

unnatural brightness. I bent forward, and the dying light of the match

touched that other face.

"Oh, God!" whispered Smith.

A faint puff of wind extinguished the match.

In all my surgical experience I had never met with anything quite so

horrible. Forsyth's livid face was streaked with tiny streams of

blood, which proceeded from a series of irregular wounds. One group of

these clustered upon his left temple, another beneath his right eye,

and others extended from the chin down to the throat. They were

black, almost like tattoo marks, and the entire injured surface was

bloated indescribably. His fists were clenched; he was quite rigid.

Smith's piercing eyes were set upon me eloquently as I knelt on the

path and made my examination--an examination which that first glimpse

when Forsyth came staggering out from the trees had rendered

useless--a mere matter of form.

"He's quite dead, Smith," I said huskily. "It's--unnatural--it--"

Smith began beating his fist into his left palm and taking little,

short, nervous strides up and down beside the dead man. I could hear a

car skirling along the high-road, but I remained there on my knees

staring dully at the disfigured bloody face which but a matter of

minutes since had been that of a clean-looking British seaman. I found

myself contrasting his neat, squarely trimmed moustache with the

bloated face above it, and counting the little drops of blood which

trembled upon its edge. There were footsteps approaching. I arose. The

footsteps quickened, and I turned as a constable ran up.

"What's this?" he demanded gruffly, and stood with his fists clenched,

looking from Smith to me and down at that which lay between us. Then

his hand flew to his breast; there was a silvern gleam and--

"Drop that whistle!" snapped Smith, and struck it from the man's hand.

"Where's your lantern? Don't ask questions!"

The constable started back and was evidently debating upon his chances

with the two of us, when my friend pulled a letter from his pocket and

thrust it under the man's nose.

"Read that!" he directed harshly, "and then listen to my orders."

There was something in his voice which changed the officer's opinion

of the situation. He directed the light of his lantern upon the open

letter, and seemed to be stricken with wonder.

"If you have any doubt," continued Smith--"you may not be familiar

with the Commissioner's signature--you have only to ring up Scotland

Yard from Dr. Petrie's house, to which we shall now return to disperse

it." He pointed to Forsyth. "Help us to carry him there. We must not

be seen; this must be hushed up. You understand? It must not get into

the Press--"

The man saluted respectfully, and the three of us addressed ourselves

to the mournful task. By slow stages we bore the dead man to the edge

of the common, carried him across the road and into my house, without

exciting attention even on the part of those vagrants who nightly

slept out in the neighbourhood.

We laid our burden upon the surgery table.

"You will want to make an examination, Petrie," said Smith in his

decisive way, "and the officer here might 'phone for the ambulance. I

have some investigations to make also. I must have the pocket lamp."

He raced upstairs to his room, and an instant later came running down

again. The front door banged.

"The telephone is in the hall," I said to the constable.

"Thank you, sir."

He went out of the surgery as I switched on the lamp over the table

and began to examine the marks upon Forsyth's skin. These, as I have

said, were in groups and nearly all in the form of elongated

punctures; a fairly deep incision with a pear-shaped and superficial

scratch beneath it. One of the tiny wounds had penetrated the right

eye.

The symptoms, or those which I had been enabled to observe as Forsyth

had first staggered into view from among the elms, were most puzzling.

Clearly enough the muscles of articulation and the respiratory

muscles had been affected; and now the livid face, dotted over with

tiny wounds (they were also on the throat), set me mentally groping

for a clue to the manner of his death.

No clue presented itself; and my detailed examination of the body

availed me nothing. The grey herald of dawn was come when the police

arrived with the ambulance and took Forsyth away.

I was just taking my cap from the rack when Nayland Smith returned.

"Smith!" I cried, "have you found anything?"

He stood there in the grey light of the hall-way tugging at the lobe

of his left ear.

The bronzed face looked very gaunt, I thought, and his eyes were

bright with that febrile glitter which once I had disliked, but which

I had learned from experience to be due to tremendous nervous

excitement. At such times he could act with icy coolness, and his

mental faculties seemed temporarily to acquire an abnormal keenness.

He made no direct reply, but--

"Have you any milk?" he jerked abruptly.

So wholly unexpected was the question that for a moment I failed to

grasp it. Then--

"Milk!" I began.

"Exactly, Petrie! If you can find me some milk, I shall be obliged."

I turned to descend to the kitchen, when--

"The remains of the turbot from dinner, Petrie, would also be welcome,

and I think I should like a trowel."

I stopped at the stairhead and faced him.

"I cannot suppose that you are joking, Smith," I said, "but--"

He laughed dryly.

"Forgive me, old man," he replied. "I was so preoccupied with my own

train of thought that it never occurred to me how absurd my request

must have sounded. I will explain my singular tastes later; at the

moment, hustle is the watchword."

Evidently he was in earnest, and I ran downstairs accordingly,

returning with a garden trowel, a plate of cold fish, and a glass of

milk.

"Thanks, Petrie," said Smith. "If you would put the milk in a jug--"

I was past wondering, so I simply went and fetched a jug, into which

he poured the milk. Then, with the trowel in his pocket, the plate of

cold turbot in one hand and the milk-jug in the other, he made for the

door. He had it open, when another idea evidently occurred to him.

"I'll trouble you for the pistol, Petrie."

I handed him the pistol without a word.

"Don't assume that I want to mystify you," he added, "but the presence

of any one else might jeopardize my plan. I don't expect to be long."

The cold light of dawn flooded the hall-way momentarily; then the door

closed again and I went upstairs to my study, watching Nayland Smith

as he strode across the common in the early morning mist. He was

making for the Nine Elms, but I lost sight of him before he reached

them.

I sat there for some time, watching for the first glow of sunrise. A

policeman tramped past the house, and, a while later, a belated

reveller in evening clothes. That sense of unreality assailed me

again. Out there in the grey mist a man who was vested with powers

which rendered him a law unto himself, who had the British Government

behind him in all that he might choose to do, who had been summoned

from Rangoon to London on singular and dangerous business, was

employing himself with a plate of cold turbot, a jug of milk, and a

trowel!

Away to the right, and just barely visible, a tramcar stopped by the

common, then proceeded on its way, coming in a westerly direction. Its

lights twinkled yellowly through the greyness, but I was less

concerned with the approaching car than with the solitary traveller

who had descended from it.

As the car went rocking by below me I strained my eyes in an endeavour

more clearly to discern the figure, which, leaving the high-road, had

struck-out across the common. It was that of a woman, who seemingly

carried a bulky bag or parcel.

One must be a gross materialist to doubt that there are latent powers

in man which man, in modern times, neglects or knows not how to

develop. I became suddenly conscious of a burning curiosity respecting

this lonely traveller who travelled at an hour so strange. With no

definite plan in mind, I went downstairs, took a cap from the rack and

walked briskly out of the house and across the common in a direction

which I thought would enable me to head off the woman.

I had slightly miscalculated the distance, as Fate would have it, and

with a patch of gorse effectually screening my approach, I came upon

her, kneeling on the damp grass and unfastening the bundle which had

attracted my attention. I stopped and watched her.

She was dressed in bedraggled fashion in rusty black, wore a common

black straw hat and a thick veil; but it seemed to me that the

dexterous hands at work untying the bundle were slim and white, and I

perceived a pair of hideous cotton gloves lying on the turf beside

her. As she threw open the wrappings and lifted out something that

looked like a small shrimping-net, I stepped around the bush, crossed

silently the intervening patch of grass and stood beside her.

A faint breath of perfume reached me--of a perfume which, like the

secret incense of Ancient Egypt, seemed to assail my soul. The glamour

of the Orient was in that subtle essence, and I only knew one woman

who used it. I bent over the kneeling figure.

"Good morning," I said; "can I assist you in any way?"

She came to her feet like a startled deer, and flung away from me with

the lithe movement of some Eastern dancing-girl.

Now came the sun, and its heralding rays struck sparks from the jewels

upon the white fingers of this woman who wore the garments of a

mendicant. My heart gave a great leap. It was with difficulty that I

controlled my voice.

"There is no cause for alarm," I added.

She stood watching me; even through the coarse veil I could see how

her eyes glittered. I stooped and picked up the net.

"Oh!" The whispered word was scarcely audible; but it was enough. I

doubted no longer.

"This is a net for bird-snaring," I said. "What strange bird are you

seeking, \_Kâramanèh\_?"

With a passionate gesture Kâramanèh snatched off the veil, and with it

the ugly black hat. The cloud of wonderful intractable hair came

rumpling about her face, and her glorious eyes blazed out upon me. How

beautiful they were, with the dark beauty of an Egyptian night; how

often had they looked into mine in dreams!

To labour against a ceaseless yearning for a woman whom one knows, upon

evidence that none but a fool might reject, to be worthless--evil; is

there any torture to which the soul of man is subject, more pitiless?

Yet this was my lot, for what past sins assigned to me I was unable to

conjecture; and this was the woman, this lovely slave of a monster, this

creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"I suppose you will declare that you do not know me!" I said harshly.

Her lips trembled, but she made no reply.

"It is very convenient to forget, sometimes," I ran on bitterly, then

checked myself, for I knew that my words were prompted by a feckless

desire to hear her defence, by a fool's hope that it might be an

acceptable one. I looked again at the net contrivance in my hand; it

had a strong spring fitted to it and a line attached. Quite obviously

it was intended for snaring. "What were you about to do?" I demanded

sharply; but in my heart, poor fool that I was, I found admiration for

the exquisite arch of Kâramanèh's lips, and reproach because they were

so tremulous.

She spoke then.

"Dr. Petrie--"

"Well?"

"You seem to be--angry with me, not so much because--of what I do, as

because I do not remember you. Yet--"

"Kindly do not revert to the matter," I interrupted. "You have chosen,

very conveniently, to forget that once we were friends. Please

yourself; but answer my question."

She clasped her hands with a sort of wild abandon.

"Why do you treat me so?" she cried. She had the most fascinating

accent imaginable. "Throw me into prison, kill me if you like for what

I have done!" She stamped her foot. "For what I have done! But do not

torture me, try to drive me mad with your reproaches--that I forget

you! I tell you--again I tell you--that until you came one night, last

week, to rescue some one from"--(there was the old trick of hesitating

before the name of Fu-Manchu)--"from \_him\_, I had never, never seen

you!"

The dark eyes looked into mine, afire with a positive hunger for

belief--or so I was sorely tempted to suppose. But the facts were

against her.

"Such a declaration is worthless," I said, as coldly as I could. "You

are a traitress; you betray those who are mad enough to trust you--"

"I am no traitress!" she blazed at me. Her eyes were magnificent.

"This is mere nonsense. You think that it will pay you better to serve

Fu-Manchu than to remain true to your friends. Your 'slavery'--for I

take it you are posing as a slave again--is evidently not very harsh.

You serve Fu-Manchu, lure men to their destruction, and in return he

loads you with jewels, lavishes gifts--"

"Ah! so!"

She sprang forward, raising flaming eyes to mine; her lips were

slightly parted. With that wild abandon which betrayed the desert

blood in her veins, she wrenched open the neck of her bodice and

slipped a soft shoulder free of the garment. She twisted around, so

that the white skin was but inches removed from me.

"These are some of the gifts that he lavishes upon me!"

I clenched my teeth. Insane thoughts flooded my mind. For that creamy

skin was wealed with the marks of the lash!

She turned, quickly rearranging her dress, and watching me the while.

I could not trust myself to speak for a moment, then--

"If I am a stranger to you, as you claim, why do you give me your

confidence?" I asked.

"I have known you long enough to trust you!" she said simply, and

turned her head aside.

"Then why do you serve this inhuman monster?"

She snapped her fingers oddly, and looked up at me from under her

lashes. "Why do you question me if you think that everything I say is

a lie?"

It was a lesson in logic--from a woman! I changed the subject.

"Tell me what you came here to do," I demanded.

She pointed to the net in my hands.

"To catch birds; you have said so yourself."

"What bird?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

And now a memory was born within my brain: it was that of the cry of

the nighthawk which had harbingered the death of Forsyth! The net was

a large and strong one; could it be that some horrible fowl of the

air--some creature unknown to Western naturalists--had been released

upon the common last night? I thought of the marks upon Forsyth's face

and throat; I thought of the profound knowledge of obscure and

dreadful things possessed by the Chinaman.

The wrapping in which the net had been lay at my feet. I stooped and

took out from it a wicker basket. Kâramanèh stood watching me and

biting her lip, but she made no move to check me. I opened the basket.

It contained a large phial, the contents of which possessed a pungent

and peculiar smell.

I was utterly mystified.

"You will have to accompany me to my house," I said sternly.

Kâramanèh upturned her great eyes to mine. They were wide with fear.

She was on the point of speaking when I extended my hand to grasp her.

At that, the look of fear was gone and one of rebellion held its

place. Ere I had time to realize her purpose, she flung back from me

with that wild grace which I had met with in no other woman,

turned--and ran!

Fatuously, net and basket in hand, I stood looking after her. The idea

of pursuit came to me certainly; but I doubted if I could outrun her.

For Kâramanèh ran, not like a girl used to town or even country life,

but with the lightness and swiftness of a gazelle; ran like the

daughter of the desert that she was.

Some two hundred yards she went, stopped, and looked back. It would

seem that the sheer joy of physical effort had aroused the devil in

her, the devil that must lie latent in every woman with eyes like the

eyes of Kâramanèh.

In the ever-brightening sunlight I could see the lithe figure swaying;

no rags imaginable could mask its beauty. I could see the red lips and

gleaming teeth. Then--and it was music good to hear, despite its

taunt--she laughed defiantly, turned, and ran again!

I resigned myself to defeat; I blush to add, gladly! Some evidences of

a world awakening were perceptible about me now. Feathered choirs

hailed the new day joyously. Carrying the mysterious contrivance which

I had captured from the enemy, I set out in the direction of my house,

my mind very busy with conjectures respecting the link between this

bird-snare and the cry like that of a nighthawk which we had heard at

the moment of Forsyth's death.

The path that I had chosen led me around the border of the Mound

Pond--a small pool having an islet in the centre. Lying at the margin

of the pond I was amazed to see the plate and jug which Nayland Smith

had borrowed recently.

Dropping my burden, I walked down to the edge of the water. I was

filled with a sudden apprehension. Then, as I bent to pick up the now

empty jug, came a hail:

"All right, Petrie! Shall join you in a moment!"

I started up, looked to right and left; but, although the voice had

been that of Nayland Smith, no sign could I discern of his presence!

"Smith!" I cried. "Smith!"

"Coming!"

Seriously doubting my senses, I looked in the direction from which the

voice had seemed to proceed--and there was Nayland Smith.

He stood on the islet in the centre of the pond, and, as I perceived

him, he walked down into the shallow water and waded across to me!

"Good heavens!" I began.

One of his rare laughs interrupted me.

"You must think me mad this morning, Petrie!" he said. "But I have

made several discoveries. Do you know what that islet in the pond

really is?"

"Merely an islet, I suppose."

"Nothing of the kind; it is a burial mound, Petrie! It marks the site

of one of the Plague Pits where victims were buried during the Great

Plague of London. You will observe that although you have seen it

every morning for some years, it remains for a British Commissioner

lately resident in Burma to acquaint you with its history!

Hullo!"--the laughter was gone from his eyes, and they were steely

hard again--"what the blazes have we here?"

He picked up the net. "What! A bird-trap!"

"Exactly!" I said.

Smith turned his searching gaze upon me. "Where did you find it,

Petrie?"

"I did not exactly find it," I replied; and I related to him the

circumstances of my meeting with Kâramanèh.

He directed that cold stare upon me throughout the narrative, and

when, with some embarrassment, I had told him of the girl's escape--

"Petrie," he said succinctly, "you are an imbecile!"

I flushed with anger, for not even from Nayland Smith, whom I esteemed

above all other men, could I accept such words uttered as he had

uttered them. We glared at one another.

"Kâramanèh," he continued coldly, "is a beautiful toy, I grant you;

but so is a cobra. Neither is suitable for playful purposes."

"Smith!" I cried hotly, "drop that! Adopt another tone or I cannot

listen to you!"

"You \_must\_ listen," he said, squaring his lean jaw truculently. "You

are playing, not only with a pretty girl who is the favourite of a

Chinese Nero, but with \_my life\_! And I object, Petrie, on purely

personal grounds!"

I felt my anger oozing from me; for this was strictly just. I had

nothing to say and Smith continued:

"You \_know\_ that she is utterly false, yet a glance or two from those

dark eyes of hers can make a fool of you! A woman made a fool of me

once, but I learned my lesson; you have failed to learn yours. If you

are determined to go to pieces on the rock that broke up Adam, do so!

But don't involve me in the wreck, Petrie, for that might mean a

yellow emperor of the world, and you know it!"

"Your words are unnecessarily brutal, Smith," I said, feeling very

crestfallen, "but there--perhaps I fully deserve them all."

"You \_do\_!" he assured me, but he relaxed immediately. "A murderous

attempt is made upon my life, resulting in the death of a perfectly

innocent man in no way concerned. Along you come and let an

accomplice, perhaps a participant, escape, merely because she has a

red mouth, or black lashes, or whatever it is that fascinates you so

hopelessly!"

He opened the wicker basket, sniffing at the contents.

"Ah!" he snapped, "do you recognize this odour?"

"Certainly."

"Then you have some idea respecting Kâramanèh's quarry?"

"Nothing of the kind!"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along, Petrie," he said, linking his arm in mine.

We proceeded. Many questions there were that I wanted to put to him,

but one above all.

"Smith," I said, "what, in Heaven's name, were you doing on the mound?

Digging something up?"

"No," he replied, smiling dryly, "burying something!"

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE ELMS

Dusk found Nayland Smith and me at the top bedroom window. We knew,

now that poor Forsyth's body had been properly examined, that he had

died from poisoning. Smith, declaring that I did not deserve his

confidence, had refused to confide in me his theory of the origin of

the peculiar marks upon the body.

"On the soft ground under the trees," he said, "I found his tracks

right up to the point where--something happened. There were no other

fresh tracks for several yards around. He was attacked as he stood

close to the trunk of one of the elms. Six or seven feet away I found

some other tracks, very much like this."

He marked a series of dots upon the blotting-pad, for this

conversation took place during the afternoon.

"Claws!" I cried. "That eerie call! like the call of a nighthawk--is

it some unknown species of--flying thing?"

"We shall see, shortly; possibly to-night," was his reply. "Since,

probably owing to the absence of any moon, a mistake was made"--his

jaw hardened at the thought of poor Forsyth--"another attempt along

the same lines will almost certainly follow--you know Fu-Manchu's

system?"

So in the darkness, expectant, we sat watching the group of nine elms.

To-night the moon was come, raising her Aladdin's lamp up to the star

world and summoning magic shadows into being. By midnight the

high-road showed deserted, the common was a place of mystery; and save

for the periodical passage of an electric car, in blazing modernity,

this was a fit enough stage for an eerie drama.

No notice of the tragedy had appeared in print; Nayland Smith was

vested with powers to silence the Press. No detectives, no special

constables, were posted. My friend was of opinion that the publicity

which had been given to the deeds of Dr. Fu-Manchu in the past,

together with the sometimes clumsy co-operation of the police, had

contributed not a little to the Chinaman's success.

"There is only one thing to fear," he jerked suddenly; "he may not be

ready for another attempt to-night."

"Why?"

"Since he has only been in England for a short time, his menagerie of

venomous things may be a limited one at present."

Earlier in the evening there had been a brief but violent

thunderstorm, with a tropical downpour of rain, and now clouds were

scudding across the blue of the sky. Through a temporary rift in the

veiling the crescent of the moon looked down upon us. It had a

greenish tint, and it set me thinking of the filmed, green eyes of

Fu-Manchu.

The cloud passed and a lake of silver spread out to the edge of the

coppice; where it terminated at a shadow bank.

"There it is, Petrie!" hissed Nayland Smith.

A lambent light was born in the darkness; it rose slowly, unsteadily,

to a great height, and died.

"It's under the trees, Smith!"

But he was already making for the door. Over his shoulder:

"Bring the pistol, Petrie!" he cried; "I have another. Give me at

least twenty yards' start or no attempt may be made. But the instant

I'm under the trees, join me."

Out of the house we ran, and over on to the common, which latterly had

been a pageant-ground for phantom warring. The light did not appear

again; and as Smith plunged off toward the trees, I wondered if he

knew what uncanny thing was hidden there. I more than suspected that

he had solved the mystery.

His instructions to keep well in the rear I understood. Fu-Manchu, or

the creature of Fu-Manchu, would attempt nothing in the presence of a

witness. But we knew full well that the instrument of death which was

hidden in the elm coppice could do its ghastly work and leave no clue,

could slay and vanish. For had not Forsyth come to a dreadful end

while Smith and I were within twenty yards of him?

Not a breeze stirred, as Smith, ahead of me--for I had slowed my

pace--came up level with the first tree. The moon sailed clear of the

straggling cloud wisps which alone told of the recent storm; and I

noted that an irregular patch of light lay silvern on the moist ground

under the elms where otherwise lay shadow.

He passed on, slowly. I began to run again. Black against the silvern

patch, I saw him emerge--and look up.

"Be careful, Smith!" I cried--and I was racing under the trees to join

him.

Uttering a loud cry, he leaped--away from the pool of light.

"Stand back, Petrie!" he screamed. "Back! farther!"

He charged into me, shoulder lowered, and sent me reeling!

Mixed up with his excited cry I had heard a loud splintering and

sweeping of branches overhead; and now as we staggered into the

shadows it seemed that one of the elms was reaching down to touch us!

So, at least, the phenomenon presented itself to my mind in that

fleeting moment while Smith, uttering his warning cry, was hurling me

back.

Then the truth became apparent.

With an appalling crash, a huge bough fell from above. One piercing

awful shriek there was, a crackling of broken branches, and a choking

groan....

The crack of Smith's pistol close beside me completed my confusion of

mind.

"Missed!" he yelled. "Shoot it, Petrie! On your left! For God's sake

don't miss it!"

I turned. A lithe black shape was streaking past me. I

fired--once--twice. Another frightful cry made yet more hideous the

nocturne.

Nayland Smith was directing the ray of a pocket torch upon the fallen

bough.

"Have you killed it, Petrie?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!"

I stood beside him, looking down. From the tangle of leaves and twigs

an evil yellow face looked up at us. The features were contorted with

agony, but the malignant eyes, wherein light was dying, regarded us

with inflexible hatred. The man was pinned beneath the heavy bough;

his back was broken; and, as we watched, he expired, frothing slightly

at the mouth, and quitted his tenement of clay leaving those glassy

eyes set hideously upon us.

"The pagan gods fight upon our side," said Smith strangely. "Elms have

a dangerous habit of shedding boughs in still weather--particularly

after a storm. Pan, god of the woods, with this one has performed

Justice's work of retribution."

"I don't understand. Where was this man--?"

"Up the tree, lying along the bough which fell, Petrie! That is why he

left no footmarks. Last night no doubt he made his escape by swinging

from bough to bough, ape-fashion, and descending to the ground

somewhere at the other side of the coppice."

He glanced at me.

"You are wondering, perhaps," he suggested, "what caused the

mysterious light? I could have told you this morning, but I fear I was

in a bad temper, Petrie. It's very simple; a length of tape soaked in

spirit or something of the kind, and sheltered from the view of any

one watching from your windows, behind the trunk of the tree; then,

the end ignited, lowered, still behind the tree, to the ground. The

operator swinging it around, the flame ascended, of course. I found

the unburned fragment of the tape used last night, a few yards from

here."

I was peering down at Fu-Manchu's servant, the hideous yellow man who

lay dead in a bower of elm leaves.

"He has some kind of leather bag beside him," I began.

"Exactly!" rapped Smith. "In that he carried his dangerous instrument

of death; from that he released it!"

"Released what?"

"What your fascinating friend came to recapture this morning."

"Don't taunt me, Smith!" I said bitterly. "Is it some species of

bird?"

"You saw the marks on Forsyth's body, and I told you of those which I

had traced upon the ground here. They were caused by \_claws\_, Petrie!"

"Claws! I thought so! But \_what\_ claws?"

"The claws of a poisonous thing. I recaptured the one used last night,

killed it--against my will--and buried it on the mound. I was afraid

to throw it in the pond, lest some juvenile fisherman should pull it

out and sustain a scratch. I don't know how long the claws would

remain venomous."

"You are treating me like a child, Smith," I said, slowly. "No doubt I

am hopelessly obtuse, but perhaps you will tell me what this Chinaman

carried in a leather bag and released upon Forsyth. It was something

which you recaptured, apparently with the aid of a plate of cold

turbot and a jug of milk. It was something, also, which Kâramanèh had

been sent to recapture with the aid--"

I stopped.

"Go on," said Nayland Smith, turning the ray to the left; "what did

she have in the basket?"

"Valerian," I replied mechanically.

The ray rested upon the lithe creature that I had shot down.

It was a black cat!

"A cat will go through fire and water for valerian," said Smith; "but

I got first innings this morning with fish and milk! I had recognized

the imprints under the trees for those of a cat, and I knew that if a

cat had been released here it would still be hiding in the

neighbourhood, probably in the bushes. I finally located a cat, sure

enough, and came for bait! I laid my trap, for the animal was too

frightened to be approachable, and then shot it; I had to. That yellow

fiend used the light as a decoy. The branch which killed him jutted

out over the path at a spot where an opening in the foliage above

allowed some moon rays to penetrate. Directly the victim stood

beneath, the Chinaman uttered his bird-cry; the one below looked up,

and the cat, previously held silent and helpless in the leather sack,

was dropped accurately upon his head!"

"But--" I was growing confused.

Smith stooped lower.

"The cat's claws are sheathed now," he said; "but if you could examine

them you would find that they are coated with a shining black

substance. Only Fu-Manchu knows what that substance is, Petrie; but

you and I know what it can do!"

CHAPTER VII

ENTER MR. ABEL SLATTIN

"I don't blame you!" rapped Nayland Smith. "Suppose we say, then, a

thousand pounds if you show us the present hiding-place of Fu-Manchu,

the payment to be in no way subject to whether we profit by your

information or not?"

Abel Slattin shrugged his shoulders, racially, and returned to the

armchair which he had just quitted. He reseated himself, placing his

hat and cane upon my writing-table.

"A little agreement in black and white?" he suggested smoothly.

Smith raised himself up out of the white cane chair, and, bending

forward over a corner of the table, scribbled busily upon a sheet of

notepaper with my fountain-pen.

The while he did so, I covertly studied our visitor. He lay back in

the armchair, his heavy eyelids lowered deceptively. He was a thought

overdressed--a big man, dark-haired and well-groomed, who toyed with a

monocle most unsuitable to his type. During the preceding

conversation, I had been vaguely surprised to note Mr. Abel Slattin's

marked American accent.

Sometimes, when Slattin moved, a big diamond which he wore upon the

third finger of his right hand glittered magnificently. There was a

sort of bluish tint underlying the dusky skin, noticeable even in his

hands but proclaiming itself significantly in his puffy face and

especially under the eyes. I diagnosed a labouring valve somewhere in

the heart system.

Nayland Smith's pen scratched on. My glance strayed from our Semitic

caller to his cane, lying upon the red leather before me. It was of

most unusual workmanship, apparently Indian, being made of some kind

of dark brown, mottled wood, bearing a marked resemblance to a snake's

skin; and the top of the cane was carved in conformity, to represent

the head of what I took to be a puff-adder, fragments of stone, or

beads, being inserted to represent the eyes, and the whole thing being

finished with an artistic realism almost startling.

When Smith had tossed the written page to Slattin, and he, having read

it with an appearance of carelessness, had folded it neatly and placed

it in his pocket, I said:

"You have a curio here?"

Our visitor, whose dark eyes revealed all the satisfaction which, by

his manner, he sought to conceal, nodded and took up the cane in his

hand.

"It comes from Australia, doctor," he replied; "it's aboriginal work,

and was given to me by a client. You thought it was Indian? Everybody

does. It's my mascot."

"Really?"

"It is indeed. Its former owner ascribed magical powers to it! In

fact, I believe he thought that it was one of those staffs mentioned

in biblical history--"

"Aaron's rod?" suggested Smith, glancing at the cane.

"Something of the sort," said Slattin, standing up and again preparing

to depart.

"You will 'phone us, then?" asked my friend.

"You will hear from me to-morrow," was the reply.

Smith returned to the cane armchair, and Slattin, bowing to both of

us, made his way to the door as I rang for the girl to show him out.

"Considering the importance of his proposal," I began, as the door

closed, "you hardly received our visitor with cordiality."

"I hate to have any relations with him," answered my friend; "but we

must not be squeamish respecting our instruments in dealing with Dr.

Fu-Manchu. Slattin has a rotten reputation--even for a private inquiry

agent. He is little better than a blackmailer--"

"How do you know?"

"Because I called on our friend Weymouth at the Yard yesterday and

looked up the man's record."

"Whatever for?"

"I knew that he was concerning himself, for some reason, in the case.

Beyond doubt he has established some sort of communication with the

Chinese group; I am only wondering--"

"You don't mean--"

"Yes--I do, Petrie! I tell you he is unscrupulous enough to stoop even

to that."

No doubt Slattin knew that this gaunt, eager-eyed Burmese commissioner

was vested with ultimate authority in his quest of the mighty Chinaman

who represented things unutterable, whose potentialities for evil were

boundless as his genius, who personified a secret danger, the extent

and nature of which none of us truly understood. And, learning of

these things, with unerring Semitic instinct he had sought an opening

in this glittering Rialto. But there were \_two\_ bidders!

"You think he may have sunk so low as to become a creature of

Fu-Manchu?" I asked, aghast.

"Exactly! If it paid him well I do not doubt that he would serve that

master as readily as any other. His record is about as black as it

well could be. Slattin is, of course, an assumed name; he was known as

Lieutenant Pepley when he belonged to the New York Police, and he was

kicked out of the service for complicity in an unsavoury Chinatown

case."

"Chinatown!"

"Yes, Petrie, it made me wonder, too; and we must not forget that he

is undeniably a clever scoundrel."

"Shall you keep any appointment which he may suggest?"

"Undoubtedly. But I shall not wait until to-morrow."

"What!"

"I propose to pay a little informal visit to Mr. Abel Slattin

to-night."

"At his office?"

"No; at his private residence. If, as I more than suspect, his object

is to draw us into some trap, he will probably report his favourable

progress to his employer to-night!"

"Then we should have followed him!"

Nayland Smith stood up and divested himself of the old

shooting-jacket.

"He \_has\_ been followed, Petrie," he replied, with one of his rare

smiles. "Two C.I.D. men have been watching the house all night!"

This was entirely characteristic of my friend's farseeing methods.

"By the way," I said, "you saw Eltham this morning. He will soon be

convalescent. Where, in Heaven's name, can he--"

"Don't be alarmed on his behalf, Petrie," interrupted Smith. "His life

is no longer in danger."

I stared, stupidly.

"No longer in danger!"

"He received, some time yesterday, a letter, written in Chinese, upon

Chinese paper, and enclosed in an ordinary business envelope, having a

typewritten address and bearing a London postmark."

"Well?"

"As nearly as I can render the message in English it reads: 'Although,

because you are a brave man, you would not betray your correspondent in

China, he has been discovered. He was a mandarin, and as I cannot write

the name of a traitor, I may not name him. He was executed four days

ago. I salute you and pray for your speedy recovery.--FU-MANCHU.'"

"Fu-Manchu! But it is almost certainly a trap."

"On the contrary, Petrie, Fu-Manchu would not have written in Chinese

unless he were sincere; and, to clear all doubt, I received a cable

this morning reporting that the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat was assassinated

in his own garden, in Nan-Yang, one day last week."

CHAPTER VIII

DR. FU-MANCHU STRIKES

Together we marched down the slope of the quiet, suburban avenue; to

take pause before a small, detached house displaying the hatchet

boards of the estate agent. Here we found unkempt laurel bushes, and

acacias run riot, from which arboreal tangle protruded the notice: "To

be Let or Sold."

Smith, with an alert glance to right and left, pushed open the wooden

gate and drew me in upon the gravel path. Darkness mantled all; for

the nearest street lamp was fully twenty yards beyond.

From the miniature jungle bordering the path, a soft whistle sounded.

"Is that Carter?" called Smith sharply.

A shadowy figure uprose, and vaguely I made it out for that of a man

in the unobtrusive blue serge which is the undress uniform of the

Force.

"Well?" rapped my companion.

"Mr. Slattin returned ten minutes ago, sir," reported the constable.

"He came in a cab which he dismissed--"

"He has not left again?"

"A few minutes after his return," the man continued, "another cab came

up, and a lady alighted."

"A lady!"

"The same, sir, that has called upon him before."

"Smith!" I whispered, plucking at his arm--"is it--?"

He half turned, nodding his head; and my heart began to throb

foolishly. For now the manner of Slattin's campaign suddenly was

revealed to me. In our operations against the Chinese murder-group two

years before, we had had an ally in the enemy's camp--Kâramanèh, the

beautiful slave, whose presence in those happenings of the past had

coloured the sometimes sordid drama with the opulence of old Arabia;

who had seemed a fitting figure for the romances of Bagdad during the

Caliphate--Kâramanèh, whom I had thought sincere, whose inscrutable

Eastern soul I had presumed, fatuously, to have laid bare and

analysed.

Now once again she was plying her old trade of go-between; professing

to reveal the secrets of Dr. Fu-Manchu, and all the time--I could not

doubt it--inveigling men into the net of this awful fisher.

Yesterday, I had been her dupe; yesterday, I had rejoiced in my

captivity. To-day, I was not the favoured one; to-day I had not been

selected recipient of her confidences--confidences sweet, seductive,

deadly: but Abel Slattin, a plausible rogue, who, in justice, should

be immured in Sing Sing, was chosen out, was enslaved by those lovely

mysterious eyes, was taking to his soul the lies which fell from those

perfect lips, triumphant in a conquest that must end in his undoing;

deeming, poor fool, that for love of him this pearl of the Orient was

about to betray her master, to resign herself a prize to the victor!

Companioned by these bitter reflections, I had lost the remainder of

the conversation between Nayland Smith and the police officer; now,

casting off the succubus memory which threatened to obsess me, I put

forth a giant mental effort to purge my mind of this uncleanness, and

became again an active participant in the campaign against the

Master--the director of all things noxious.

Our plans being evidently complete, Smith seized my arm, and I found

myself again out upon the avenue. He led me across the road and into

the gate of a house almost opposite. From the fact that two upper

windows were illuminated, I adduced that the servants were retiring;

the other windows were in darkness, except for one on the ground floor

to the extreme left of the building, through the lowered venetian

blinds whereof streaks of light shone out.

"Slattin's study!" whispered Smith. "He does not anticipate

surveillance, and you will note that the window is wide open!"

With that my friend crossed the strip of lawn, and, careless of the

fact that his silhouette must have been visible to any one passing the

gate, climbed carefully up the artificial rockery intervening, and

crouched upon the window-ledge peering into the room.

A moment I hesitated, fearful that if I followed I should stumble or

dislodge some of the lava blocks of which the rockery was composed.

Then I heard that which summoned me to the attempt, whatever the cost.

Through the open window came the sound of a musical voice--a voice

possessing a haunting accent, possessing a quality which struck upon

my heart and set it quivering as though it were a gong hung in my

bosom.

Kâramanèh was speaking.

Upon hands and knees, heedless of damage to my garments, I crawled up

beside Smith. One of the laths was slightly displaced and over this my

friend was peering in. Crouching close beside him, I peered in also.

I saw the study of a business man, with its files, neatly arranged

works of reference, roll-top desk, and Milner safe. Before the desk,

in a revolving chair, sat Slattin. He sat half-turned towards the

window, leaning back and smiling; so that I could note the gold crown

which preserved the lower left molar. In an armchair by the window,

close, very close, and sitting with her back to me, was Kâramanèh!

She, who, in my dreams, I always saw, was ever seeing, in an Eastern

dress, with gold bands about her white ankles, with jewel-laden

fingers, with jewels in her hair, wore now a fashionable costume and a

hat that could only have been produced in Paris. Kâramanèh was the one

Oriental woman I had ever known who could wear European clothes; and

as I watched that exquisite profile, I thought that Delilah must have

been just such another as this; that, excepting the Empress Poppæ,

history has record of no woman who, looking so innocent, was yet so

utterly vile.

"Yes, my dear," Slattin was saying, and through his monocle ogling his

beautiful visitor, "I shall be ready for you to-morrow night."

I felt Smith start at the words.

"There will be a sufficient number of men?"

Kâramanèh put the question in a strangely listless way.

"My dear little girl," replied Slattin, rising and standing looking

down at her, with his gold tooth twinkling in the lamplight, "there

will be a whole division, if a whole division is necessary."

He sought to take her white gloved hand, which rested upon the chair

arm; but she evaded the attempt with seeming artlessness, and stood

up. Slattin fixed his bold gaze upon her.

"So now, give me my orders," he said.

"I am not prepared to do so, yet," replied the girl composedly; "but

now that I know you are ready, I can make my plans."

She glided past him to the door, avoiding his outstretched arm with an

artless art which made me writhe; for once I had been the willing

victim of all these wiles.

"But--" began Slattin.

"I will ring you up in less than half an hour," said Kâramanèh; and

without further ceremony, she opened the door.

I still had my eyes glued to the aperture in the blind, when Smith

began tugging at my arm.

"Down! you fool!" he hissed sharply; "if she sees us, all is lost!"

Realizing this, and none too soon, I turned, and rather clumsily

followed my friend. I dislodged a piece of granite in my descent; but,

fortunately Slattin had gone out into the hall and could not well have

heard it.

We were crouching around an angle of the house, when a flood of light

poured down the steps, and Kâramanèh rapidly descended. I had a

glimpse of a dark-faced man who evidently had opened the door for her;

then all my thoughts were centred upon that graceful figure receding

from me in the direction of the avenue. She wore a loose cloak, and I

saw this fluttering for a moment against the white gate-posts; then

she was gone.

Yet Smith did not move. Detaining me with his hand he crouched there

against a quick-set hedge; until, from a spot lower down the hill, we

heard the start of the cab, which had been waiting. Twenty seconds

elapsed, and from some other distant spot a second cab started.

"That's Weymouth!" snapped Smith. "With decent luck, we should know

Fu-Manchu's hiding-place before Slattin tells us!"

"But--"

"Oh! as it happens he's apparently playing the game." In the

half-light, Smith stared at me significantly. "Which makes it all the

more important," he concluded, "that we should not rely upon his aid!"

Those grim words were prophetic.

My companion made no attempt to communicate with the detective (or

detectives) who shared our vigil; we took up a position close under

the lighted study window and waited--waited.

Once, a taxi-cab laboured hideously up the steep gradient of the

avenue.... It was gone. The lights at the upper windows above us

became extinguished. A policeman tramped past the gateway, casually

flashing his lamp in at the opening. One by one the illuminated

windows in other houses visible to us became dull; then lived again as

mirrors for the pallid moon. In the silence, words spoken within the

study were clearly audible; and we heard some one--presumably the man

who had opened the door--inquire if his services would be wanted again

that night.

Smith inclined his head and hung over me in a tense attitude, in order

to catch Slattin's reply.

"Yes, Burke," it came, "I want you to sit up until I return; I shall

be going out shortly."

Evidently the man withdrew at that; for a complete silence followed

which prevailed for fully half an hour. I sought cautiously to move my

cramped limbs, unlike Smith, who seeming to have sinews of piano-wire,

crouched beside me immovable, untiringly. Then loud upon the

stillness, broke the strident note of the telephone bell.

I started, nervously, clutching at Smith's arm. It felt hard as iron

to my grip.

"Hullo!" I heard Slattin call, "who is speaking?... Yes, yes! This is

Mr. A. S.... I am to come at once?... I know where--yes!... You will

meet me there?... Good!--I shall be with you in half an hour....

Good-bye!"

Distinctly I heard the creak of the revolving office-chair as Slattin

rose; then Smith had me by the arm, and we were flying swiftly away

from the door to take up our former post around the angle of the

building. This gained--

"He's going to his death!" rapped Smith beside me; "but Carter has a

cab from the Yard waiting in the nearest rank. We shall follow to see

where he goes--for it is possible that Weymouth may have been thrown

off the scent; then, when we are sure of his destination, we can take

a hand in the game! We--"

The end of the sentence was lost to me--drowned in such a frightful

wave of sound as I despair to describe. It began with a high, thin

scream, which was choked off staccato fashion; upon it followed a loud

and dreadful cry uttered with all the strength of Slattin's lungs.

"Oh, God!" he cried, and again--"Oh, God!"

This in turn merged into a sort of hysterical sobbing.

I was on my feet now, and automatically making for the door. I had a

vague impression of Nayland Smith's face beside me, the eyes glassy

with a fearful apprehension. Then the door was flung open, and, in the

bright light of the hall-way, I saw Slattin standing--swaying and

seemingly fighting with the empty air.

"What is it? For God's sake, what has happened?" reached my ears

dimly--and the man Burke showed behind his master. White-faced I saw

him to be; for now Smith and I were racing up the steps.

Ere we could reach him, Slattin, uttering another choking cry, pitched

forward and lay half across the threshold.

We burst into the hall, where Burke stood with both his hands raised

dazedly to his head. I could hear the sound of running feet upon the

gravel, and knew that Carter was coming to join us.

Burke, a heavy man with a lowering, bull-dog type of face, collapsed

on to his knees beside Slattin, and began softly to laugh in little

rising peals.

"Drop that!" snapped Smith, and grasping him by the shoulders, he sent

him spinning along the hall-way, where he sank upon the bottom step of

the stairs, to sit with his outstretched fingers extended before his

face, and peering at us grotesquely through the crevices.

There were rustlings and subdued cries from the upper part of the

house. Carter came in out of the darkness, carefully stepping over the

recumbent figure; and the three of us stood there in the lighted hall

looking down at Slattin.

"Help me to move him back," directed Smith tensely; "far enough to

close the door."

Between us we accomplished this, and Carter fastened the door. We were

alone with the shadow of Fu-Manchu's vengeance; for as I knelt beside

the body on the floor, a look and a touch sufficed to tell me that

this was but clay from which the spirit had fled!

Smith met my glance as I raised my head, and his teeth came together

with a loud snap; the jaw muscles stood out prominently beneath the

dark skin; and his face was grimly set in that old, half-despairful

expression which I knew so well but which boded so ill for whomsoever

occasioned it.

"Dead, Petrie--already?"

"Lightning could have done the work no better. Can I turn him over?"

Smith nodded.

Together we stooped and rolled the heavy body on its back. A flood of

whispers came sibilantly from the stairway. Smith spun around rapidly,

and glared upon the group of half-dressed servants.

"Return to your rooms!" he rapped imperiously: "let no one come into

the hall without my orders."

The masterful voice had its usual result; there was a hurried retreat

to the upper landing. Burke, shaking like a man with an ague, sat on

the lower step, pathetically drumming his palms upon his uplifted

knees.

"I warned him, I warned him!" he mumbled monotonously, "I warned him,

oh, I warned him!"

"Stand up!" shouted Smith, "stand up and come here!"

The man, with his frightened eyes turning to right and left, and

seeming to search for something in the shadows about him, advanced

obediently.

"Have you a flask?" demanded Smith of Carter.

The detective silently administered to Burke a stiff restorative.

"Now," continued Smith, "you, Petrie, will want to examine him, I

suppose?" He pointed to the body. "And in the meantime I have some

questions to put to you, my man."

He clapped his hand upon Burke's shoulder.

"My God!" Burke broke out, "I was ten yards from him when it

happened!"

"No one is accusing you," said Smith less harshly; "but since you were

the only witness, it is by your aid that we hope to clear the matter

up."

Exerting a gigantic effort to regain control of himself, Burke nodded,

watching my friend with a childlike eagerness. During the ensuing

conversation, I examined Slattin for marks of violence; and of what I

found, more anon.

"In the first place," said Smith, "you say that you warned him. When

did you warn him, and of what?"

"I warned him, sir, that it would come to this--"

"That \_what\_ would come to this?"

"His dealings with the Chinamen!"

"He had dealings with Chinamen?"

"He accidentally met a Chinaman at an East End gaming-house, a man he

had known in 'Frisco--a man called Singapore Charlie--"

"What! Singapore Charlie!"

"Yes, sir, the same man that had a dope-shop, two years ago, down

Ratcliffe way--"

"There was a fire--"

"But Singapore Charlie escaped, sir."

"And he is one of the gang?"

"He is one of what we used to call, in New York, the Seven Group."

Smith began to tug at the lobe of his left ear, reflectively, as I saw

out of the corner of my eye.

"The Seven Group!" he mused. "That is significant. I always suspected

that Dr. Fu-Manchu and the notorious Seven Group were one and the

same. Go on, Burke."

"Well, sir," the man continued more calmly, "the lieutenant--"

"The lieutenant!" began Smith; then: "Oh! of course; Slattin used to

be a police lieutenant!"

"Well, sir, he--Mr. Slattin--had a sort of hold on this Singapore

Charlie, and two years ago, when he first met him, he thought that

with his aid he was going to pull off the biggest thing of his life--"

"Forestall \_me\_, in fact?"

"Yes, sir; but you got in first with the big raid--and spoiled it."

Smith nodded grimly, glancing at the Scotland Yard man, who returned

his nod with equal grimness.

"A couple of months ago," resumed Burke, "he met Charlie again down

East, and the Chinaman introduced him to a girl--some sort of an

Egyptian girl."

"Go on!" snapped Smith. "I know her."

"He saw her a good many times--and she came here once or twice. She

made out that she and Singapore Charlie were prepared to give away the

boss of the Yellow gang--"

"For a price, of course?"

"I suppose so," said Burke; "but I don't know. I only know that I

warned him."

"H'm!" muttered Smith. "And now, what took place to-night?"

"He had an appointment here with the girl," began Burke.

"I know all that," interrupted Smith. "I merely want to know what

took place after the telephone call."

"Well, he told me to wait up, and I was dozing in the next room to the

study--the dining-room--when the 'phone bell aroused me. I heard the

lieutenant--Mr. Slattin--coming out, and I ran out too, but only in

time to see him taking his hat from the rack--"

"But he wears no hat!"

"He never got it off the peg! Just as he reached up to take it, he

gave a most frightful scream, and turned around like lightning as

though some one had attacked him from behind!"

"There was no one else in the hall?"

"No one at all. I was standing down there outside the dining-room just

by the stairs, but he didn't turn in my direction, he turned and

looked right behind him--where there was no one--nothing. His cries

were frightful." Burke's voice broke, and he shuddered feverishly.

"Then he made a rush for the front door. It seemed as though he had

not seen me. He stood there screaming; but, before I could reach him,

he fell...."

Nayland Smith fixed a piercing gaze upon Burke.

"Is that all you know?" he demanded slowly.

"As God is my judge, sir, that's all I know, and all I saw. There was

no living thing near him when he met his death."

"We shall see," muttered Smith. He turned to me. "What killed him,

Petrie?" he asked shortly.

"Apparently something which occasioned a minute wound on the left

wrist," I replied, and, stooping, I raised the already cold hand in

mine.

A tiny, inflamed wound showed on the wrist; and a certain puffiness

was becoming observable in the injured hand and arm. Smith bent down

and drew a quick, sibilant breath.

"You know what this is, Petrie?" he cried.

"Certainly. It was too late to employ a ligature and useless to

inject ammonia. Death was practically instantaneous. His heart...."

There came a loud knocking and ringing.

"Carter!" cried Smith, turning to the detective, "open that door to no

one--no one. Explain who I am--"

"But if it is the inspector--?"

"I said, open the door to \_no one\_!" snapped Smith. "Burke, stand

exactly where you are! Carter, you can speak to whoever knocks through

the letter-box. Petrie, don't move for your life! It may be here, in

the hall way!..."

CHAPTER IX

THE CLIMBER

Our search of the house of Abel Slattin ceased only with the coming of

the dawn and yielded nothing but disappointment. Failure followed upon

failure; for, in the grey light of the morning, our own quest

concluded, Inspector Weymouth returned to report that the girl,

Kâramanèh, had thrown him off the scent.

Again he stood before me, the big, burly friend of old and dreadful

days: a little greyer above the temples, which I set down for a record

of former horrors; but deliberate, stoical, thorough, as ever. His

blue eyes melted in the old generous way as he saw me, and he gripped

my hand in greeting.

"Once again," he said, "your dark-eyed friend has been too clever for

me, doctor. But the track, as far as I could follow, leads to the old

spot. In fact"--he turned to Smith, who, grim-faced and haggard,

looked thoroughly ill in that grey light--"I believe Fu-Manchu's lair

is somewhere near the former opium-den of Shen-Yan--'Singapore

Charlie'!"

Smith nodded.

"We will turn our attention in that direction," he replied, "at a very

early date."

Inspector Weymouth looked down at the body of Abel Slattin.

"How was it done?" he asked softly.

"Clumsily for Fu-Manchu," I replied. "A snake was introduced into the

house by some means--"

"By Kâramanèh!" rapped Smith.

"Very possibly by Kâramanèh," I continued firmly. "The thing has

escaped us."

"My own idea," said Smith, "is that it was concealed about his

clothing. When he fell by the open door it glided out of the house. We

must have the garden searched thoroughly by daylight."

"\_He\_"--Weymouth glanced at that which lay upon the floor--"must be

moved; but otherwise we can leave the place untouched, clear out the

servants, and lock the house up!"

"I have already given orders to that effect," answered Smith. He spoke

wearily and with a note of conscious defeat in his voice. "Nothing has

been disturbed"--he swept his arm around comprehensively--"papers and

so forth you can examine at leisure."

Presently we quitted that house upon which the fateful Chinaman had

set his seal, as the suburb was awakening to a new day. The clank of

milk-cans was my final impression of the avenue to which a dreadful

minister of death had come at the bidding of the death lord. We left

Inspector Weymouth in charge and returned to my rooms, scarcely

exchanging a word upon the way.

Nayland Smith, ignoring my entreaties, composed himself for slumber in

the white cane chair in my study. About noon he retired to the

bath-room and, returning, made a pretence to breakfast; then resumed

his seat in the cane armchair. Carter reported in the afternoon, but

his report was merely formal. Returning from my round of professional

visits at half-past five, I found Nayland Smith in the same position;

and so the day waned into evening, and dusk fell uneventfully.

In the corner of the big room by the empty fireplace, Nayland Smith

lay, his long, lean frame extended in the white cane chair. A tumbler,

from which two straws protruded, stood by his right elbow, and a

perfect continent of tobacco smoke lay between us, wafted towards the

door by the draught from an open window. He had littered the hearth

with matches and tobacco ash, being the most untidy smoker I had ever

met; and save for his frequent rappings out of his pipe bowl and

perpetual striking of matches, he had shown no sign of activity for

the past hour. Collarless and wearing an old tweed jacket, he had

spent the evening, as he had spent the day, in the cane chair, only

quitting it for some ten minutes, or less, to toy with dinner.

My several attempts at conversation had elicited nothing but growls;

therefore, as dusk descended, having dismissed my few patients, I

busied myself collating my notes upon the renewed activity of the

Yellow Doctor, and was thus engaged when the 'phone bell disturbed me.

It was Smith who was wanted, however; and he went out eagerly, leaving

me to my task.

At the end of a lengthy conversation, he returned from the 'phone and

began, restlessly, to pace the room. I made a pretence of continuing

my labours, but covertly I was watching him. He was twitching at the

lobe of his left ear, and his face was a study in perplexity. Abruptly

he burst out:

"I shall throw the thing up, Petrie! Either I am growing too old to

cope with such an adversary as Fu-Manchu, or else my intellect has

become dull. I cannot seem to think clearly or consistently. For the

Doctor, this crime, this removal of Slattin, is clumsy--unfinished.

There are two explanations. Either he, too, is losing his old

cunning, or he has been interrupted!"

"Interrupted!"

"Take the facts, Petrie." Smith clapped his hands upon my table and

bent down, peering into my eyes. "Is it characteristic of Fu-Manchu to

kill a man by the direct agency of a snake and to implicate one of his

own damnable servants in this way?"

"But we have found no snake!"

"Kâramanèh introduced one in some way. Do you doubt it?"

"Certainly Kâramanèh visited him on the evening of his death, but you

must be perfectly well aware that even if she had been arrested, no

jury could convict her."

Smith resumed his restless pacings up and down.

"You are very useful to me, Petrie," he rapped; "as a counsel for the

defence you constantly rectify my errors of prejudice. Yet I am

convinced that our presence at Slattin's house last night prevented

Fu-Manchu from finishing off this little matter as he had designed to

do."

"What has given you this idea?"

"Weymouth is responsible. He has rung me up from the Yard. The

constable on duty at the house where the murder was committed, reports

that some one, less than an hour ago, attempted to break in."

"Break in!"

"Ah! you are interested? \_I\_ thought the circumstance illuminating,

also!"

"Did the officer see this person?"

"No; he only heard him. It was some one who endeavoured to enter by

the bath-room window, which, I am told, may be reached fairly easily

by an agile climber."

"The attempt did not succeed?"

"No; the constable interrupted, but failed to make a capture or even

to secure a glimpse of the man."

We were both silent for some moments; then--

"What do you propose to do?" I asked.

"We must not let Fu-Manchu's servants know," replied Smith, "but

to-night I shall conceal myself in Slattin's house and remain there

for a week or a day--it matters not how long--until that attempt is

repeated. Quite obviously, Petrie, we have overlooked something which

implicates the murderer with the murder! In short, either by accident,

by reason of our superior vigilance, or by the clumsiness of his

plans, Fu-Manchu for once in an otherwise blameless career has left a

\_clue\_!"

CHAPTER X

THE CLIMBER RETURNS

In utter darkness we groped our way through into the hall of Slattin's

house, having entered, stealthily, from the rear; for Smith had

selected the study as a suitable base of operations. We reached it

without mishap, and presently I found myself seated in the very chair

which Kâramanèh had occupied; my companion took up a post just within

the widely opened door.

So we commenced our ghostly business in the house of the murdered

man--a house from which, but a few hours since, his body had been

removed. This was such a vigil as I had endured once before, when,

with Nayland Smith and another, I had waited for the coming of one of

Fu-Manchu's death agents.

Of all the sounds which one by one now began to detach themselves from

the silence, there was a particular sound, homely enough at another

time, which spoke to me more dreadfully than the rest. It was the

ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece; and I thought how this

sound must have been familiar to Abel Slattin, how it must have formed

part and parcel of his life, as it were, and how it went on

now--\_tick\_-\_tick\_-\_tick\_-\_tick\_--whilst he, for whom it had ticked,

lay unheeding--would never heed it more.

As I grew more accustomed to the gloom, I found myself staring at the

office chair; once I found myself expecting Abel Slattin to enter the

room and occupy it. There was a little China Buddha upon a bureau in

one corner, with a gilded cap upon its head, and as some reflection of

the moonlight sought out this little cap, my thoughts grotesquely

turned upon the murdered man's gold tooth.

Vague creakings from within the house, sounds as though of stealthy

footsteps upon the stairs, set my nerves tingling; but Nayland Smith gave

no sign, and I knew that my imagination was magnifying these ordinary night

sounds out of all proportion to their actual significance. Leaves rustled

faintly outside the window at my back: I construed their sibilant whispers

into the dreaded name--\_Fu-Manchu\_--\_Fu-Manchu\_--\_Fu-Manchu\_!

So wore on the night; and, when the ticking clock hollowly boomed the

hour of one, I almost leapt out of my chair, so highly strung were my

nerves, and so appallingly did the sudden clangour beat upon them.

Smith, like a man of stone, showed no sign. He was capable of so

subduing his constitutionally high-strung temperament, at times, that

temporarily he became immune from human dreads. On such occasion he

would be icily cool amid universal panic; but, his object

accomplished, I have seen him in such a state of collapse, that utter

nervous exhaustion is the only term by which I can describe it.

\_Tick\_-\_tick\_-\_tick\_-\_tick\_ went the clock, and, my heart still

thumping noisily in my breast, I began to count the tickings; \_one\_,

\_two\_, \_three\_, \_four\_, \_five\_, and so on to a hundred, and from one

hundred to many hundreds.

Then, out from the confusion of minor noises, a new, arresting sound

detached itself. I ceased my counting; no longer I noted the

\_tick\_-\_tick\_ of the clock, nor the vague creakings, rustlings and

whispers. I saw Smith, shadowly, raise his hand in warning--in

needless warning; for I was almost holding my breath in an effort of

acute listening.

From high up in the house this new sound came--from above the topmost

rooms, it seemed, up under the roof; a regular squeaking, oddly

familiar, yet elusive. Upon it followed a very soft and muffled thud;

then a metallic sound as of a rusty hinge in motion; then a new

silence, pregnant with a thousand possibilities more eerie than any

clamour.

My mind was rapidly at work. Lighting the topmost landing of the house

was a sort of glazed trap, evidently set in the floor of a loft-like

place extending over the entire building. Somewhere in the red-tiled

roof above, there presumably existed a corresponding skylight or

lantern.

So I argued; and, ere I had come to any proper decision, another

sound, more intimate, came to interrupt me.

This time I could be in no doubt; some one was lifting the trap above

the stairhead--slowly, cautiously, and all but silently. Yet to my

ears, attuned to trifling disturbances, the trap creaked and groaned

noisily.

Nayland Smith waved to me to take a stand on the other side of the

opened door--behind it, in fact, where I should be concealed from the

view of any one descending the stair.

I stood up and crossed the floor to my new post.

A dull thud told of the trap fully raised and resting upon some

supporting joist. A faint rustling (of discarded garments, I told

myself) spoke to my newly awakened, acute perceptions, of the visitor

preparing to lower himself to the landing. Followed a groan of

woodwork submitted to sudden strain--and the unmistakable pad of bare

feet upon the linoleum of the top corridor.

I knew now that one of Dr. Fu-Manchu's uncanny servants had gained the

roof of the house by some means, had broken through the skylight and

had descended by means of the trap beneath on to the landing.

In such a tensed-up state as I cannot describe, nor, at this hour

mentally reconstruct, I waited for the creaking of the stairs which

should tell of the creature's descent.

I was disappointed. Removed scarce a yard from me as he was, I could

hear Nayland Smith's soft, subdued breathing; but my eyes were all for

the darkened hall-way, for the smudgy outline of the stair-rail with

the faint patterning in the background, which, alone, indicated the

wall.

It was amid an utter silence, unheralded by even so slight a sound as

those which I had acquired the power of detecting--that I saw the

continuity of the smudgy line of stair-rail to be interrupted.

A dark patch showed upon it, just within my line of sight, invisible

to Smith on the other side of the doorway, and some ten or twelve

stairs up.

No sound reached me, but the dark patch vanished--and reappeared three

feet lower down.

Still I knew that this phantom approach must be unknown to my

companion--and I knew that it was impossible for me to advise him of

it unseen by the dreaded visitor.

A third time the dark patch--the hand of one who, ghostly, silent, was

creeping down into the hall-way--vanished and reappeared on a level

with my eyes. Then a vague shape became visible; no more than a blur

upon the dim design of the wall-paper ... and Nayland Smith got his

first sight of the stranger.

The clock on the mantelpiece boomed out the half-hour.

At that, such was my state (I blush to relate it), I uttered a faint

cry!

It ended all secrecy--that hysterical weakness of mine. It might have

frustrated our hopes; that it did not do so was in no measure due to

me. But in a sort of passionate whirl, the ensuing events moved

swiftly.

Smith hesitated not one instant. With a panther-like leap he hurled

himself into the hall.

"The lights, Petrie!" he cried, "the lights! The switch is near the

street door!"

I clenched my fists in a swift effort to regain control of my

treacherous nerves, and, bounding past Smith, and past the foot of the

stair, I reached out my hand to the switch, the situation of which,

fortunately, I knew.

Around I came, in response to a shrill cry from behind me--an inhuman

cry, less a cry than the shriek of some enraged animal....

With his left foot upon the first stair, Nayland Smith stood, his lean

body bent perilously backward, his arms rigidly thrust out, and his

sinewy fingers gripping the throat of an almost naked man--a man whose

brown body glistened unctuously, whose shaven head was apish low,

whose bloodshot eyes were the eyes of a mad dog! His teeth, upper and

lower, were bared; they glistened, they gnashed, and a froth was on

his lips. With both his hands, he clutched a heavy stick, and

once--twice, he brought it down upon Nayland Smith's head!

I leapt forward to my friend's aid; but as though the blows had been

those of a feather, he stood like some figure of archaic statuary, nor

for an instant relaxed the death-grip which he had upon his

adversary's throat.

Thrusting my way up the stairs, I wrenched the stick from the hand of

the dacoit--for in this glistening brown man I recognized one of that

deadly brotherhood who hailed Dr. Fu-Manchu their Lord and Master.

\* \* \* \* \*

I cannot dwell upon the end of that encounter; I cannot hope to make

acceptable to my readers an account of how Nayland Smith, glassy-eyed,

and with consciousness ebbing from him instant by instant, stood

there, a realization of Leighton's "Athlete," his arms rigid as iron

bars even after Fu-Manchu's servant hung limply in that frightful

grip.

In his last moment of consciousness, with the blood from his wounded

head trickling down into his eyes, he pointed to the stick which I had

torn from the grip of the dacoit, and which I still held in my hand.

"Not Aaron's rod, Petrie!" he gasped hoarsely ... "the rod of

Moses!--Slattin's stick!"

Even in upon my anxiety for my friend, amazement intruded.

"But," I began--and turned to the rack in which Slattin's favourite

cane at that moment reposed--had reposed at the time of his death.

Yes! There stood Slattin's cane; we had not moved it; we had disturbed

nothing in that stricken house; there it stood, in company with an

umbrella and a malacca.

I glanced at the cane in my hand. Surely there could not be two such

in the world?

Smith collapsed on the floor at my feet.

"Examine the one in the rack, Petrie," he whispered, almost inaudibly,

"but do not touch it. It may not be yet...."

I propped him up against the foot of the stairs, and as the constable

began knocking violently at the street door, crossed to the rack and

lifted out the replica of the cane which I held in my hand.

A faint cry from Smith--and as if it had been a leprous thing, I

dropped the cane instantly.

"Merciful God!" I groaned.

Although, in every other particular, it corresponded with that which I

held--which I had taken from the dacoit--which he had come to

substitute for the cane now lying upon the floor--in one dreadful

particular it differed.

Up to the snake's head it was an accurate copy; \_but the head lived\_!

Either from pain, fear, or starvation, the thing confined in the

hollow tube of this awful duplicate was become torpid. Otherwise, no

power on earth could have saved me from the fate of Abel Slattin; for

the creature was an Australian death-adder.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHITE PEACOCK

Nayland Smith wasted no time in pursuing the plan of campaign which he

had mentioned to Inspector Weymouth. Less than forty-eight hours after

quitting the house of the murdered Slattin I found myself bound along

Whitechapel Road upon strange enough business.

A very fine rain was falling, which rendered it difficult to see

clearly from the windows; but the weather apparently had little effect

upon the commercial activities of the district. The cab was threading

a hazardous way through the cosmopolitan throng crowding the street.

On either side of me extended a row of stalls, seemingly established

in opposition to the more legitimate shops upon the inner side of the

pavement.

Jewish hawkers, many of them in their shirt-sleeves, acclaimed the

rarity of the bargains which they had to offer; and, allowing for the

difference of costume, these tireless Israelites, heedless of climatic

conditions, sweating at their mongery, might well have stood, not in

a squalid London thoroughfare, but in an equally squalid market-street

of the Orient.

They offered linen and fine raiment; from foot-gear to hair-oil their

wares ranged. They enlivened their auctioneering with conjuring tricks

and witty stories, selling watches by the aid of legerdemain, and

fancy vests by grace of a seasonable anecdote.

Poles, Russians, Serbs, Roumanians, Jews of Hungary, and Italians of

Whitechapel mingled in the throng. Near East and Far East rubbed

shoulders. Pidgin English contested with Yiddish for the ownership of

some tawdry article offered by an auctioneer whose nationality defied

conjecture, save that always some branch of his ancestry had drawn

nourishment from the soil of Eternal Judæa.

Some wearing men's caps, some with shawls thrown over their oily

locks, and some, more true to primitive instincts, defying,

bare-headed, the unkindly elements, bedraggled women--more often than

not burdened with muffled infants--crowded the pavements and the

roadway, thronged about the stalls like white ants about some choicer

carrion.

And the fine drizzling rain fell upon all alike, pattering upon the

hood of the taxi-cab; trickling down the front windows; glistening

upon the unctuous hair of those in the street who were hatless; dewing

the bare arms of the auctioneers, and dripping, melancholy, from the

tarpaulin coverings of the stalls. Heedless of the rain above and of

the mud beneath, North, South, East and West mingled their cries,

their bids, their blandishments, their raillery, mingled their persons

in that joyless throng.

Sometimes a yellow face showed close to one of the streaming windows;

sometimes a black-eyed, pallid face, but never a face wholly sane and

healthy. This was an underworld where squalor and vice went hand in

hand through the beautiless streets, a melting-pot of the world's

outcasts; this was the shadowland which last night had swallowed up

Nayland Smith.

Ceaselessly I peered to right and left, searching amid that

rain-soaked company for any face known to me. Whom I expected to find

there, I know not, but I should have counted it no matter for surprise

had I detected amid that ungracious ugliness the beautiful face of

Kâramanèh, the Eastern slave-girl, the leering yellow face of a

Burmese dacoit, the gaunt, bronze features of Nayland Smith; a hundred

times I almost believed that I had seen the ruddy countenance of

Inspector Weymouth, and once (at what instant my heart seemed to stand

still) I suffered from the singular delusion that the oblique green

eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu peered out from the shadows between two stalls.

It was mere phantasy, of course, the sick imaginings of a mind

overwrought. I had not slept and had scarcely tasted food for more

than thirty hours; for, following up a faint clue supplied by Burke,

Slattin's man, and, like his master, an ex-officer of New York Police,

my friend, Nayland Smith, on the previous evening, had set out in

quest of some obscene den where the man called Shen-Yan--former keeper

of an opium shop--was now said to be in hiding. Shen-Yan we knew to be

a creature of the Chinese doctor, and only a most urgent call had

prevented me from joining Smith upon this promising, though hazardous

expedition.

At any rate, Fate willing it so, he had gone without me; and

now--although Inspector Weymouth, assisted by a number of C.I.D. men,

was sweeping the district about me--to the time of my departure

nothing whatever had been heard of Smith. The ordeal of waiting

finally had proved too great to be borne. With no definite idea of

what I proposed to do, I had thrown myself into the search, filled

with such dreadful apprehensions as I hope never again to experience.

I did not know the exact situation of the place to which Smith was

gone, for owing to the urgent case which I have mentioned, I had been

absent at the time of his departure; nor could Scotland Yard enlighten

me upon this point. Weymouth was in charge of the case--under Smith's

direction--and since the inspector had left the Yard, early that

morning, he had disappeared as completely as Smith, no report having

been received from him.

As my driver turned into the black mouth of a narrow, ill-lighted

street, and the glare and clamour of the greater thoroughfare died

behind me, I sank into the corner of the cab burdened with such a

sense of desolation as mercifully comes but rarely.

We were heading now for that strange settlement off the West India

Dock Road, which, bounded by Limehouse Causeway and Pennyfields, and

narrowly confined within four streets, composes an unique Chinatown, a

miniature of that at Liverpool, and of the greater one in San

Francisco. Inspired with an idea which promised hopefully, I raised

the speaking-tube:

"Take me first to the River Police Station," I directed; "along

Ratcliffe Highway."

The man turned and nodded comprehendingly, as I could see through the

wet pane.

Presently we swerved to the right and into an even narrower street.

This inclined in an easterly direction, and proved to communicate with

a wide thoroughfare along which passed brilliantly lighted electric

trams. I had lost all sense of direction, and when, swinging to the

left and to the right again, I looked through the window and perceived

that we were before the door of the Police Station, I was dully

surprised.

In quite mechanical fashion I entered the depôt. Inspector Ryman, our

associate in one of the darkest episodes of the campaign with the

Yellow Doctor two years before, received me in his office.

By a negative shake of the head, he answered my unspoken question.

"The ten o'clock boat is lying off the Stone Stairs, doctor," he said,

"and co-operating with some of the Scotland Yard men who are dragging

that district--"

I shuddered at the word "dragging"; Ryman had not used it literally, but

nevertheless it had conjured up a dread possibility--a possibility in

accordance with the methods of Dr. Fu-Manchu. All within space of an

instant I saw the tide of Limehouse Reach, the Thames lapping about the

green-coated timbers of a dock pier; and rising--falling--sometimes

disclosing to the pallid light a rigid hand, sometimes a horribly

bloated face--I saw the body of Nayland Smith at the mercy of those oily

waters. Ryman continued:

"There is a launch out, too, patrolling the riverside from here to

Tilbury. Another lies at the breakwater." He jerked his thumb over his

shoulder. "Should you care to take a run down and see for yourself?"

"No, thanks," I replied, shaking my head. "You are doing all that can

be done. Can you give me the address of the place to which Mr. Smith

went last night?"

"Certainly," said Ryman; "I thought you knew it. You remember

Shen-Yan's place--by Limehouse Basin? Well, farther east--east of the

Causeway, between Gill Street and Three Colt Street--is a block of

wooden buildings. You recall them?"

"Yes," I replied. "Is the man established there again, then?"

"It appears so, but although you have evidently not been informed of

the fact, Weymouth raided the establishment in the early hours of this

morning!"

"Well?" I cried.

"Unfortunately with no result," continued the inspector. "The

notorious Shen-Yan was missing, and although there is no real doubt

that the place is used as a gaming-house, not a particle of evidence

to that effect could be obtained. Also--there was no sign of Mr.

Nayland Smith, and no sign of the American Burke, who had led him to

the place."

"Is it certain that they went there?"

"Two C.I.D. men, who were shadowing, actually saw the pair of them

enter. A signal had been arranged, but it was never given; and at

about half-past four the place was raided."

"Surely some arrests were made?"

"But there was no evidence!" cried Ryman. "Every inch of the

rat-burrow was searched. The Chinese gentleman who posed as the

proprietor of what he claimed to be a respectable lodging-house,

offered every facility to the police. What could we do?"

"I take it that the place is being watched?"

"Certainly," said Ryman. "Both from the river and from the shore. Oh!

they are not there! God knows where they are, but they are not

\_there\_!"

I stood for a moment in silence, endeavouring to determine my course;

then, telling Ryman that I hoped to see him later, I walked out slowly

into the rain and mist, and nodding to the taxi-driver to proceed to

our original destination, I re-entered the cab.

As we moved off, the lights of the River Police depôt were swallowed

up in the humid murk, and again I found myself being carried through

the darkness of those narrow streets, which, like a maze, hold secret

within their Labyrinth mysteries great, and at least as foul, as that

of Parsiphaë.

The marketing centres I had left far behind me; to my right stretched

the broken range of riverside buildings, and beyond them flowed the

Thames, a stream heavily burdened with secrets as ever were Tiber or

Tigris. On my left, occasional flickering lights broke through the

mist, for the most part the lights of taverns; and saving these rents

in the veil, the darkness was punctuated with nothing but the faint

and yellow luminance of the street lamps.

Ahead was a black mouth, which promised to swallow me up as it had

swallowed up my friend.

In short, what with my lowered condition, and consequent frame of

mind, and what with the traditions, for me inseparable from that

gloomy quarter of London, I was in the grip of a shadowy menace which

at any moment might become tangible--I perceived, in the most

commonplace objects, the yellow hand of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

When the cab stopped in a place of utter darkness, I aroused myself

with an effort, opened the door, and stepped out into the mud of a

narrow lane. A high brick wall frowned upon me from one side, and,

dimly perceptible, there towered a smoke stack beyond. On my right

uprose the side of a wharf building, shadowly, and some distance

ahead, almost obscured by the drizzling rain, a solitary lamp

flickered.

I turned up the collar of my raincoat, shivering, as much at the

prospect as from physical chill.

"You will wait here," I said to the man; and, feeling in my

breast-pocket, I added: "If you hear the note of a whistle, drive on

and rejoin me."

He listened attentively and with a certain eagerness. I had selected

him that night for the reason that he had driven Smith and myself on

previous occasions and had proved himself a man of intelligence.

Transferring a Browning pistol from my hip-pocket to that of my

raincoat, I trudged on into the mist.

The headlights of the taxi were swallowed up behind me, and just

abreast of the street lamp I stood listening.

Save for the dismal sound of rain, and the trickling of water along

the gutters, all about me was silent. Sometimes this silence would be

broken by the distant, muffled note of a steam siren; and always,

forming a sort of background to the near stillness, was the remote din

of riverside activity.

I walked on to the corner just beyond the lamp. This was the street in

which the wooden buildings were situated. I had expected to detect

some evidences of surveillance, but if any were indeed being observed,

it was effectively masked. Not a living creature was visible, peer as

I would.

Plans I had none, and perceiving that the street was empty, and that

no lights showed in any of the windows, I passed on, only to find that

I had entered a cul-de-sac.

A rickety gate gave access to a descending flight of stone steps, the

bottom invisible in the denser shadows of an archway, beyond which, I

doubted not, lay the river.

Still uninspired by any definite design, I tried the gate and found

that it was unlocked. Like some wandering soul, as it has since seemed

to me, I descended. There was a lamp over the archway, but the glass

was broken, and the rain apparently had extinguished the light; as I

passed under it, I could hear the gas whistling from the burner.

Continuing my way, I found myself upon a narrow wharf with the Thames

flowing gloomily beneath me. A sort of fog hung over the river,

shutting me in. Then came an incident.

Suddenly, quite near, there arose a weird and mournful cry--a cry

indescribable, and inexpressibly uncanny!

I started back so violently that how I escaped falling into the river

I do not know to this day. That cry, so eerie and so wholly

unexpected, had unnerved me; and realizing the nature of my

surroundings, and the folly of my presence alone in such a place, I

began to edge back towards the foot of the steps, away from the thing

that cried; when--a great white shape uprose like a phantom before

me!...

There are few men, I suppose, whose lives have been crowded with so

many eerie happenings as mine, but this phantom thing which grew out

of the darkness, which seemed about to envelop me, takes rank in my

memory amongst the most fearsome apparitions which I have witnessed.

I know that I was frozen with a sort of supernatural terror. I stood

there, my hands clenched, staring--staring--at that white shape, which

seemed to float.

And as I stared, every nerve in my body thrilling, I distinguished the

outline of the phantom. With a subdued cry, I stepped forward. A new

sensation claimed me. In that one stride I passed from the horrible to

the bizarre.

I found myself confronted with something tangible certainly, but

something whose presence in that place was utterly extravagant--could

only be reconcilable in the dreams of an opium slave.

Was I awake? was I sane? Awake and sane beyond doubt, but surely

moving, not in the purlieus of Limehouse, but in the fantastic realms

of fairyland.

Swooping, with open arms, I rounded up in an angle against the

building and gathered in this screaming thing which had inspired in me

so keen a terror.

The great, ghostly fan was closed as I did so, and I stumbled back

towards the stair with my struggling captive tucked under my arm; I

mounted into one of London's darkest slums, carrying a beautiful white

peacock!

CHAPTER XII

DARK EYES LOOK INTO MINE

My adventure had done nothing to relieve the feeling of unreality

which held me enthralled. Grasping the struggling bird firmly by the

body, and having the long white tail fluttering a yard or so behind

me, I returned to where the taxi waited.

"Open the door!" I said to the man--who greeted me with such a stare

of amazement that I laughed outright, though my mirth was but hollow.

He jumped into the road and did as I directed. Making sure that both

windows were closed, I thrust the peacock into the cab and shut the

door upon it.

"For God's sake, sir--" began the driver.

"It has probably escaped from some collector's place on the

riverside," I explained, "but one never knows. See that it does not

escape again, and if at the end of an hour, as arranged, you do not

hear from me, take it back with you to the River Police Station."

"Right you are, sir," said the man, remounting his seat. "It's the

first time I ever saw a peacock in Limehouse!"

It was the first time \_I\_ had seen one, and the incident struck me as

being more than odd; it gave me an idea, and a new, faint hope. I

returned to the head of the steps, at the foot of which I had met with

this singular experience, and gazed up at the dark building beneath

which they led. Three windows were visible, but they were broken and

neglected. One, immediately above the arch, had been pasted up with

brown paper, and this was now peeling off in the rain, a little stream

of which trickled down from the detached corner to drop, drearily,

upon the stone stairs beneath.

Where were the detectives? I could only assume that they had directed

their attention elsewhere, for had the place not been utterly

deserted, surely I had been challenged.

In pursuit of my new idea, I again descended the steps. The persuasion

(shortly to be verified) that I was close upon the secret hold of the

Chinaman, grew stronger, unaccountably. I had descended some eight

steps, and was at the darkest part of the archway or tunnel, when

confirmation of my theories came to me.

A noose settled accurately upon my shoulders, was snatched tight about my

throat, and with a feeling of insupportable agony at the base of my skull,

and a sudden supreme knowledge that I was being strangled--hanged--I lost

consciousness!

How long I remained unconscious, I was unable to determine at the

time, but I learned later that it was for no more than half an hour;

at any rate, recovery was slow.

The first sensation to return to me was a sort of repetition of the

asphyxia. The blood seemed to be forcing itself into my eyes--I

choked--I felt that my end was come. And, raising my hands to my

throat, I found it to be swollen and inflamed. Then the floor upon

which I lay seemed to be rocking like the deck of a ship, and I glided

back again into a place of darkness and forgetfulness.

My second awakening was heralded by a returning sense of smell; for I

became conscious of a faint, exquisite perfume.

It brought me to my senses as nothing else could have done, and I sat

upright with a hoarse cry. I could have distinguished that perfume

amid a thousand others, could have marked it apart from the rest in a

scent bazaar. For me it had one meaning, and one meaning

only--Kâramanèh.

She was near to me, or had been near to me!

And in the first moments of my awakening I groped about in the

darkness blindly seeking her. Then my swollen throat and throbbing

head, together with my utter inability to move my neck even slightly,

reminded me of the facts as they were. I knew in that bitter moment

that Kâramanèh was no longer my friend; but, for all her beauty and

charm, was the most heartless, the most fiendish creature in the

service of Dr. Fu-Manchu. I groaned aloud in my despair and misery.

Something stirred near to me in the room, and set my nerves creeping

with a new apprehension. I became fully alive to the possibilities of

the darkness.

To my certain knowledge, Dr. Fu-Manchu at this time had been in

England for fully three months, which meant that by now he must be

equipped with all the instruments of destruction, animate and

inanimate, which dread experience had taught me to associate with him.

Now, as I crouched there in that dark apartment, listening for a

repetition of the sound, I scarcely dared to conjecture what might

have occasioned it, but my imagination peopled the place with reptiles

which writhed upon the floor, with tarantulas and other deadly insects

which crept upon the walls, which might drop upon me from the ceiling

at any moment.

Then, since nothing stirred about me, I ventured to move, turning my

shoulders, for I was unable to move my aching head; and I looked in

the direction from which a faint, very faint, light proceeded.

A regular tapping sound now began to attract my attention, and, having

turned about, I perceived that behind me was a broken window, in

places patched with brown paper; the corner of one sheet of paper was

detached, and the rain trickled down upon it with a rhythmical sound.

In a flash I realized that I lay in the room immediately above the

archway; and listening intently, I perceived above the other faint

sounds of the night, or thought that I perceived, the hissing of the

gas from the extinguished lamp-burner.

Unsteadily I rose to my feet, but found myself swaying like a drunken

man. I reached out for support, stumbling in the direction of the

wall. My foot came in contact with something that lay there, and I

pitched forward and fell....

I anticipated a crash which would put an end to my hopes of escape,

but my fall was comparatively noiseless--for I fell upon the body of a

man who lay bound up with rope close against the wall!

A moment I stayed as I fell, the chest of my fellow captive rising and

falling beneath me as he breathed. Knowing that my life depended upon

retaining a firm hold upon myself, I succeeded in overcoming the

dizziness and nausea which threatened to drown my senses, and, moving

back so that I knelt upon the floor, I fumbled in my pocket for the

electric lamp which I had placed there. My raincoat had been removed

whilst I was unconscious, and with it my pistol, but the lamp was

untouched.

I took it out, pressed the button, and directed the ray upon the face

of the man beside me.

It was Nayland Smith!

Trussed up and fastened to a ring in the wall he lay, having a cork

gag strapped so tightly between his teeth that I wondered how he had

escaped suffocation.

But although a greyish pallor showed through the tan of his skin, his

eyes were feverishly bright, and there, as I knelt beside him, I

thanked Heaven silently, but fervently.

Then, in furious haste, I set to work to remove the gag. It was most

ingeniously secured by means of leather straps buckled at the back of

his head, but I unfastened these without much difficulty, and he spat

out the gag, uttering an exclamation of disgust.

"Thank God, old man!" he said huskily. "Thank God that you are alive!

I saw them drag you in, and I thought...."

"I have been thinking the same about you for more than twenty-four

hours," I said reproachfully. "Why did you start without--?"

"I did not want you to come, Petrie," he replied. "I had a sort of

premonition. You see it was realized; and instead of being as helpless

as I, Fate has made you the instrument of my release. Quick! You have

a knife? Good!" The old, feverish energy was by no means extinguished

in him. "Cut the ropes about my wrists and ankles, but don't otherwise

disturb them."

I set to work eagerly.

"Now," Smith continued, "put that filthy gag in place again--but you

need not strap it so tightly! Directly they find that you are alive,

they will treat you the same--you understand? She has been here three

times--"

"Kâramanèh?..."

"\_Ssh\_!"

I heard a sound like the opening of a distant door.

"Quick! the straps of the gag!" whispered Smith, "and pretend to

recover consciousness just as they enter--"

Clumsily I followed his directions, for my fingers were none too

steady, replaced the lamp in my pocket, and threw myself upon the

floor.

Through half-shut eyes, I saw the door open and obtained a glimpse of

a desolate, empty passage beyond. On the threshold stood Kâramanèh.

She held in her hand a common tin oil lamp which smoked and flickered

with every movement, filling the already none too cleanly air with an

odour of burning paraffin.

She personified the \_outré\_; nothing so incongruous as her presence in

that place could well be imagined. She was dressed as I remembered

once to have seen her two years before, in the gauzy silks of the

harêm. There were pearls glittering like great tears amid the cloud of

her wonderful hair. She wore broad gold bangles upon her bare arms,

and her fingers were laden with jewellery. A heavy girdle swung from

her hips, defining the lines of her slim shape, and about one white

ankle was a gold band.

As she appeared in the doorway I almost entirely closed my eyes, but

my gaze rested fascinatedly upon the little red slippers which she

wore.

Again I detected the exquisite, elusive perfume which, like a breath

of musk, spoke of the Orient; and, as always, it played havoc with my

reason, seeming to intoxicate me as though it were the very essence of

her loveliness.

But I had a part to play, and throwing out one clenched hand so that

my fist struck upon the floor, I uttered a loud groan, and made as if

to rise upon my knees.

One quick glimpse I had of her wonderful eyes, widely opened and

turned upon me with such an enigmatical expression as set my heart

leaping wildly--then, stepping back, Kâramanèh placed the lamp upon

the boards of the passage and clapped her hands.

As I sank upon the floor in assumed exhaustion, a Chinaman with a

perfectly impassive face, and a Burman whose pock-marked, evil

countenance was set in an apparently habitual leer, came running into

the room past the girl.

With a hand which trembled violently, she held the lamp whilst the two

yellow ruffians tied me. I groaned and struggled feebly, fixing my

gaze upon the lamp bearer in a silent reproach which was by no means

without its effect.

She lowered her eyes and I could see her biting her lip, whilst the

colour gradually faded from her cheeks. Then, glancing up again

quickly, and still meeting that reproachful stare, she turned her head

aside altogether, and rested one hand upon the wall, swaying slightly

as she did so.

It was a singular ordeal for more than one of that incongruous group;

but in order that I may not be charged with hypocrisy or with seeking

to hide my own folly, I confess, here, that when again I found myself

in darkness, my heart was leaping not because of the success of my

strategy, but because of the success of that reproachful glance which

I had directed toward the lovely, dark-eyed Kâramanèh, toward the

faithless evil Kâramanèh! So much for myself.

The door had not been closed ten seconds, ere Smith again was spitting

out the gag, swearing under his breath, and stretching his cramped

limbs free from their binding. Within a minute from the time of my

trussing, I was a free man again; save that look where I would--to

right, to left, or inward, to my own conscience--two dark eyes met

mine, enigmatically.

"What now?" I whispered.

"Let me think," replied Smith. "A false move would destroy us."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last night."

"Is Fu-Manchu--"

"Fu-Manchu is here!" replied Smith grimly, "and not only Fu-Manchu,

but--another."

"Another!"

"A higher than Fu-Manchu, apparently. I have an idea of the identity

of this person, but no more than an idea. Something unusual is going

on, Petrie; otherwise I should have been a dead man twenty four hours

ago. Something even more important than my death engages Fu-Manchu's

attention--and this can only be the presence of the mysterious

visitor. Your seductive friend, Kâramanèh, is arrayed in her very

becoming national costume in his honour, I presume." He stopped

abruptly; then added "I would give five hundred pounds for a glimpse

of that visitor's face!"

"Is Burke--?"

"God knows what has become of Burke, Petrie! We were both caught

napping in the establishment of the amiable Shen-Yan, where, amid a

very mixed company of poker players, we were losing our money like

gentlemen."

"But Weymouth--"

"Burke and I had both been neatly sand-bagged, my dear Petrie, and

removed elsewhere, some hours before Weymouth raided the gaming house.

Oh! I don't know how they smuggled us away with the police watching

the place; but my presence here is sufficient evidence of the fact.

Are you armed?"

"No; my pistol was in my raincoat, which is missing."

In the dim light from the broken window I could see Smith tugging

reflectively at the lobe of his left ear.

"I am without arms, too," he mused. "We might escape from the

window--"

"It's a long drop!"

"Ah! I imagined so. If only I had a pistol, or a revolver--"

"What should you do?"

"I should present myself before the important meeting, which, I am

assured, is being held somewhere in this building; and to-night would

see the end of my struggle with the Fu-Manchu group--the end of the

whole Yellow menace! For not only is Fu-Manchu here, Petrie, with all

his gang of assassins, but he whom I believe to be the real head of

the group--a certain mandarin--is here also!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SACRED ORDER

Smith stepped quietly across the room and tried the door. It proved to

be unlocked, and an instant later we were both outside in the passage.

Coincident with our arrival there, arose a sudden outcry from some

place at the westward end. A high-pitched, grating voice, in which

guttural notes alternated with a serpent-like hissing, was raised in

anger.

"Dr. Fu-Manchu!" whispered Smith, grasping my arm.

Indeed it was the unmistakable voice of the Chinaman, raised

hysterically in one of those outbursts which in the past I had

diagnosed as symptomatic of dangerous mania.

The voice rose to a scream, the scream of some angry animal rather

than anything human. Then, chokingly, it ceased. Another short sharp

cry followed--but not in the voice of Fu-Manchu--a dull groan, and the

sound of a fall.

With Smith still grasping my wrist, I shrank back into the doorway, as

something that looked in the darkness like a great ball of fluff came

rapidly along the passage toward me. Just at my feet the thing

stopped, and I made it out for a small animal. The tiny, gleaming eyes

looked up at me, and, chattering wickedly, the creature bounded past

and was lost from view.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu's marmoset.

Smith dragged me back into the room which we had just left. As he

partly reclosed the door, I heard the clapping of hands. In a

condition of most dreadful suspense, we waited; until a new, ominous

sound proclaimed itself. Some heavy body was being dragged into the

passage. I heard the opening of a trap. Exclamations in guttural

voices told of a heavy task in progress; there was a great straining

and creaking--whereupon the trap was softly reclosed.

Smith bent to my ear.

"Fu-Manchu has chastised one of his servants," he whispered. "There

will be food for the grappling-irons to-night!"

I shuddered violently, for, without Smith's words, I knew that a

bloody deed had been done in that house within a few yards of where we

stood.

In the new silence, I could hear the drip, drip, drip of the rain

outside the window; then a steam siren hooted dismally upon the river,

and I thought how the screw of that very vessel, even as we listened,

might be tearing the body of Fu-Manchu's servant!

"Have you some one waiting?" whispered Smith eagerly.

"How long was I insensible?"

"About half an hour."

"Then the cabman will be waiting."

"Have you a whistle with you?"

I felt in my coat pocket.

"Yes," I reported.

"Good! Then we will take a chance."

Again we slipped out into the passage and began a stealthy progress to

the west. Ten paces amid absolute darkness, and we found ourselves

abreast of a branch corridor. At the farther end, through a kind of

little window, a dim light shone.

"See if you can find the trap," whispered Smith; "light your lamp."

I directed the ray of the pocket lamp upon the floor, and there at my

feet was a square wooden trap. As I stooped to examine it, I glanced

back painfully, over my shoulder--and saw Nayland Smith tiptoeing away

from me along the passage toward the light!

Inwardly I cursed his folly, but the temptation to peep in at that

little window proved too strong for me, as it had proved too strong

for him.

Fearful that some board would creak beneath my tread, I followed; and

side by side we two crouched, looking into a small rectangular room.

It was a bare and cheerless apartment, with unpapered walls and

carpetless floor. A table and a chair constituted the sole furniture.

Seated in the chair, with his back towards us, was a portly Chinaman

who wore a yellow, silken robe. His face it was impossible to see; but

he was beating his fists upon the table, and pouring out a torrent of

words in a thin, piping voice. So much I perceived at a glance, then,

into view at the distant end of the room, paced a tall,

high-shouldered figure--a figure, unforgettable, at once imposing and

dreadful, stately and sinister.

With the long, bony hands behind him, fingers twining and intertwining

serpentinely about the handle of a little fan, and with the pointed

chin resting on the breast of the yellow robe, so that the light from

the lamp swinging in the centre of the ceiling gleamed upon the great,

dome-like brow, this tall man paced sombrely from left to right.

He cast a sidelong, venomous glance at the voluble speaker out of

half-shut eyes; in the act they seemed to light up as with an internal

luminance; momentarily, they sparkled like emeralds; then their

brilliance was filmed over as one sees in the eyes of a bird when the

membrane is lowered.

My blood seemed to chill, and my heart to double its pulsations;

beside me Smith was breathing more rapidly than usual. I knew now the

explanation of the feeling which had claimed me when first I had

descended the stone stairs. I knew what it was that hung like a miasma

over that house. It was the aura, the glamour, which radiated from

this wonderful and evil man as light radiates from radium. It was the

\_vril\_, the \_force\_, of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

I began to move away from the window. But Smith held my wrist as in a

vice. He was listening raptly to the torrential speech of the Chinaman

who sat in the chair; and I perceived in his eyes the light of a

sudden comprehension.

As the tall figure of the Chinese doctor came pacing into view again,

Smith, his head below the level of the window, pushed me gently along

the passage.

Regaining the site of the trap, he whispered to me:

"We owe our lives, Petrie, to the national childishness of the

Chinese! A race of ancestor worshippers is capable of anything, and

Dr. Fu-Manchu, the dreadful being who has rained terror upon Europe,

stands in imminent peril of disgrace for having lost a decoration."

"What do you mean, Smith?"

"I mean that this is no time for delay, Petrie! Here, unless I am

greatly mistaken, lies the rope by means of which you made your

entrance. It shall be the means of your exit. Open the trap!"

Handing the lamp to Smith, I stooped and carefully raised the

trap-door. At which moment, a singular and a dramatic thing happened.

A softly musical voice--the voice of my dreams!--spoke.

"Not that way! Oh, God, not that way!"

In my surprise and confusion I all but let the trap fall, but I

retained sufficient presence of mind to replace it gently. Standing

upright, I turned ... and there, with her little jewelled hand resting

upon Smith's arm, stood Kâramanèh!

In all my experience of him, I had never seen Nayland Smith so utterly

perplexed. Between anger, distrust and dismay, he wavered; and each

passing emotion was written legibly upon the lean bronzed features.

Rigid with surprise, he stared at the beautiful face of the girl. She,

although her hand still rested upon Smith's arm, had her dark eyes

turned upon me with that same enigmatical expression. Her lips were

slightly parted, and her breast heaved tumultuously.

This ten seconds of silence in which we three stood looking at one

another encompassed the whole gamut of human emotion. The silence was

broken by Kâramanèh.

"They will be coming back that way!" she whispered, bending eagerly

toward me. (How, in the most desperate moments, I loved to listen to

that odd, musical accent!) "Please, if you would save your life, and

spare mine, trust me!" She suddenly clasped her hands together and

looked up into my face, passionately. "Trust me--just for once--and I

will show you the way!"

Nayland Smith never removed his gaze from her for a moment, nor did he

stir.

"Oh!" she whispered tremulously, and stamped one little red slipper

upon the floor. "\_Won't\_ you heed me? \_Come\_, or it will be too late!"

I glanced anxiously at my friend; the voice of Dr. Fu-Manchu, now

raised again in anger, was audible above the piping tones of the other

Chinaman. And as I caught Smith's eye, in silent query--the trap at my

feet began slowly to lift!

Kâramanèh stifled a little sobbing cry; but the warning came too late.

A hideous yellow face, with oblique squinting eyes, appeared in the

aperture.

I found myself inert, useless; I could neither think nor act. Nayland

Smith, however, as if instinctively, delivered a pitiless kick at the

head protruding above the trap.

A sickening crushing sound, with a sort of muffled snap, spoke of a

broken jaw-bone; and with no word or cry, the Chinaman fell. As the

trap descended with a bang, I heard the thud of his body on the stone

stairs beneath.

But we were lost. Kâramanèh fled along one of the passages lightly as

a bird, and disappeared--as Dr. Fu-Manchu, his top lip drawn up above

his teeth in the manner of an angry jackal, appeared from the other.

"This way!" cried Smith, in a voice that rose almost to a

shriek--"this way!"--and he led toward the room overhanging the steps.

Off we dashed with panic swiftness, only to find that this retreat

also was cut off. Dimly visible in the darkness was a group of yellow

men, and despite the gloom, the curved blades of the knives which

they carried glittered menacingly. The passage was full of dacoits!

Smith and I turned, together. The trap was raised again, and the

Burman, who had helped to tie me, was just scrambling up beside Dr.

Fu-Manchu, who stood there watching us, a shadowy, sinister figure.

"The game's up, Petrie!" muttered Smith. "It has been a long fight,

but Fu-Manchu wins!"

"Not entirely!" I cried.

I whipped the police whistle from my pocket, and raised it to my lips;

but brief as the interval had been, the dacoits were upon me.

A sinewy brown arm shot over my shoulder, and the whistle was dashed

from my grasp. Then came a riot of maëlstrom fighting, with Smith and

myself ever sinking lower amid a whirlpool, as it seemed, of

blood-lustful eyes, yellow fangs, and gleaming blades.

I had some vague idea that the rasping voice of Fu-Manchu broke once

through the turmoil, and when, with my wrists tied behind me, I

emerged from the strife to find myself lying beside Smith in the

passage, I could only assume that the Chinaman had ordered his bloody

servants to take us alive; for saving numerous bruises and a few

superficial cuts, I was unwounded.

The place was utterly deserted again, and we two panting captives

found ourselves alone with Dr. Fu-Manchu. The scene was unforgettable:

that dimly-lighted passage, its extremities masked in shadows, and the

tall, yellow-robed figure of the Satanic Chinaman towering over us

where we lay.

He had recovered his habitual calm, and as I peered at him through the

gloom, I was impressed anew with the tremendous intellectual force of

the man. He had the brow of a genius, the features of a born ruler;

and even in that moment I could find time to search my memory, and to

discover that the face, saving the indescribable evil of its

expression, was identical with that of Seti I, the mighty Pharaoh who

lives in the Cairo Museum.

Down the passage came leaping and gambolling the Doctor's marmoset.

Uttering its shrill, whistling cry, it leapt on to his shoulder,

clutched with its tiny fingers at the scanty, neutral-coloured hair

upon his crown, and bent forward, peering grotesquely into that still,

dreadful face.

Dr. Fu-Manchu stroked the little creature and crooned to it, as a

mother to her infant. Only this crooning, and the laboured breathing

of Smith and myself, broke that impressive stillness.

Suddenly the guttural voice began:

"You come at an opportune time, Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith and Dr.

Petrie; at a time when the greatest man in China flatters me with a

visit. In my absence from home, a tremendous honour has been conferred

upon me, and, in the hour of this supreme honour, dishonour and

calamity have befallen! For my services to China--the New China, the

China of the future--I have been admitted by the Sublime Prince to the

Sacred Order of the White Peacock."

Warming to his discourse, he threw wide his arms, hurling the

chattering marmoset fully five yards along the corridor.

"Oh, god of Cathay!" he cried sibilantly, "in what have I sinned that

this catastrophe has been visited upon my head! Learn, my two dear

friends, that the sacred white peacock, brought to these misty shores

for my undying glory has been lost to me! Death is the penalty of such

a sacrilege; death shall be my lot, since death I deserve."

Covertly Smith nudged me with his elbow. I knew what the nudge was

designed to convey; he would remind me of his words--anent the

childish trifles which sway the life of intellectual China.

Personally, I was amazed. That Fu-Manchu's anger, grief, sorrow and

resignation were real, no one watching him, and hearing his voice,

could doubt. He continued:

"By one deed, and one deed alone, may I win a lighter punishment. By

one deed, and the resignation of all my titles, all my lands, and all

my honours, may I merit to be spared to my work--which has only

begun."

I knew now that we were lost, indeed; these were confidences which our

graves should hold inviolate! He suddenly opened fully those blazing

green eyes and directed their baneful glare upon Nayland Smith.

"The Director of the universe," he continued softly, "has relented

toward me. To-night, you die! To-night, the arch-enemy of our caste

shall be no more. This is my offering--the price of redemption...."

My mind was working again, and actively. I managed to grasp the

stupendous truth--and the stupendous possibility.

Dr. Fu-Manchu was in the act of clapping his hands, when I spoke.

"Stop!" I cried.

He paused, and the weird film, which sometimes became visible in his

eyes, now obscured their greenness, and lent him the appearance of a

blind man.

"Dr. Petrie," he said softly, "I shall always listen to you with

respect."

"I have an offer to make," I continued, seeking to steady my voice.

"Give us our freedom, and I will restore your shattered honour--I will

restore the sacred peacock!"

Dr. Fu-Manchu bent forward until his face was so close to mine that I

could see the innumerable lines which, an intricate network, covered

his yellow skin.

"Speak!" he hissed. "You lift up my heart from a dark pit!"

"I can restore your white peacock," I said; "I, and I alone, know

where it is!"--and I strove not to shrink from the face so close to

mine.

Upright shot the tall figure; high above his head Fu-Manchu threw his

arms--and a light of exaltation gleamed in the now widely-opened,

catlike eyes.

"Oh, god!" he screamed frenziedly. "Oh, god of the Golden Age! like a

phoenix I arise from the ashes of myself!" He turned to me. "Quick!

Quick! make your bargain! End my suspense!"

Smith stared at me like a man dazed; but, ignoring him, I went on:

"You will release me, now, immediately. In another ten minutes it will

be too late; my friend will remain. One of your--servants--can

accompany me, and give the signal when I return with the peacock. Mr.

Nayland Smith and yourself, or another, will join me at the corner of

the street where the raid took place last night. We will then give you

ten minutes' grace, after which we shall take whatever steps we

choose."

"Agreed!" cried Fu-Manchu. "I ask but one thing from an Englishman;

your word of honour?"

"I give it."

"I, also," said Smith hoarsely.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten minutes later, Nayland Smith and I, standing beside the cab, whose

lights gleamed yellowly through the mist, exchanged a struggling,

frightened bird for our lives--capitulated with the enemy of the white

race.

With characteristic audacity--and characteristic trust in the British

sense of honour--Dr. Fu-Manchu came in person with Nayland Smith, in

response to the wailing signal of the dacoit who had accompanied me.

No word was spoken, save that the cabman suppressed a curse of

amazement; and the Chinaman, his sinister servant at his elbow, bowed

low--and left us, surely to the mocking laughter of the gods!

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUGHING HORROR

I leapt up in bed with a great start.

My sleep was troubled often enough in those days which immediately

followed our almost miraculous escape from the den of Fu-Manchu; and

now, as I crouched there, nerves aquiver--listening--listening--I

could not be sure if this dank panic which possessed me had its origin

in nightmare or in something else.

Surely a scream, a choking cry for help, had reached my ears; but now,

almost holding my breath in that sort of nervous tensity peculiar to

one aroused thus, I listened, and the silence seemed complete. Perhaps

I had been dreaming....

"Help! Petrie! \_Help\_!..."

It was Nayland Smith in the room above me!

My doubts were resolved; this was no trick of an imagination

disordered. Some dreadful menace threatened my friend. Not delaying

even to snatch my dressing-gown, I rushed out on to the landing, up

the stairs, bare-footed as I was, threw open the door of Smith's room

and literally hurled myself in.

Those cries had been the cries of one assailed, had been uttered, I

judged, in the brief interval of a life and death struggle; had been

choked off....

A certain amount of moonlight found access to the room, without

spreading so far as the bed in which my friend lay. But at the moment

of my headlong entrance, and before I had switched on the light, my

gaze automatically was directed to the pale moonbeam streaming through

the window and down on to one corner of the sheep skin rug beside the

bed.

There came a sound of faint and muffled coughing,

What with my recent awakening and the panic at my heart, I could not

claim that my vision was true; but across this moonbeam passed a sort

of grey streak, for all the world as though some long thin shape had

been withdrawn, snakelike, from the room, through the open window....

From somewhere outside the house, and below, I heard the cough again,

followed by a sharp cracking sound like the lashing of a whip.

I depressed the switch, flooding the room with light, and as I leapt

forward to the bed a word picture of what I had seen formed in my

mind; and I found that I was thinking of a grey feather boa.

"Smith!" I cried (my voice seemed to pitch itself, unwilled, in a very

high key), "Smith, old man!"

He made no reply, and a sudden, sorrowful fear clutched at my

heart-strings. He was lying half out of bed flat upon his back, his

head at a dreadful angle with his body. As I bent over him and seized

him by the shoulders, I could see the whites of his eyes. His arms

hung limply, and his fingers touched the carpet.

"My God!" I whispered, "what has happened?"

I heaved him back on to the pillow, and looked anxiously into his

face. Habitually gaunt, the flesh so refined away by the consuming

nervous energy of the man as to reveal the cheekbones in sharp

prominence, he now looked truly ghastly. His skin was so sun-baked as

to have changed constitutionally; nothing could ever eradicate that

tan. But to-night a fearful greyness was mingled with the brown, his

lips were purple ... and there were marks of strangulation upon the

lean throat--ever darkening weals of clutching fingers.

He began to breathe stertorously and convulsively, inhalation being

accompanied by a significant gurgle in the throat. But now my calm was

restored in face of a situation which called for professional

attention.

I aided my friend's laboured respirations by the usual means, setting

to work vigorously; so that presently he began to clutch at his

inflamed throat which that murderous pressure had threatened to close.

I could hear sounds of movements about the house, showing that not I

alone had been awakened by those hoarse screams.

"It's all right, old man," I said, bending over him: "brace up!"

He opened his eyes--they looked bleared and bloodshot--and gave me a

quick glance of recognition.

"It's all right, Smith!" I said--"no! don't sit up; lie there for a

moment."

I ran across to the dressing-table, whereon I perceived his flask to

lie, and mixed him a weak stimulant with which I returned to the bed.

As I bent over him again, my housekeeper appeared in the doorway, pale

and wide-eyed.

"There is no occasion for alarm," I said over my shoulder; "Mr.

Smith's nerves are overwrought and he was awakened by some disturbing

dream. You can return to bed, Mrs. Newsome."

Nayland Smith seemed to experience much difficulty in swallowing the

contents of the tumbler which I held to his lips; and, from the way in

which he fingered the swollen glands, I could see that his throat,

which I had vigorously massaged, was occasioning him great pain. But

the danger was past, and already that glassy look was disappearing

from his eyes, nor did they protrude so unnaturally.

"God, Petrie!" he whispered, "that was a near shave! I haven't the

strength of a kitten!"

"The weakness will pass off," I replied; "there will be no collapse,

now. A little more fresh air...."

I stood up, glancing at the windows, then back at Smith, who forced a

wry smile in answer to my look.

"Couldn't be done, Petrie," he said huskily.

His words referred to the state of the windows. Although the night was

oppressively hot, these were only opened some four inches at top and

bottom. Farther opening was impossible because of iron brackets

screwed firmly into the casements, which prevented the windows being

raised or lowered farther.

It was a precaution adopted after long experience of the servants of

Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Now, as I stood looking from the half-strangled man upon the bed to

those screwed-up windows, the fact came home to my mind that this

precaution had proved futile. I thought of the thing which I had

likened to a feather boa; and I looked at the swollen weals made by

clutching fingers upon the throat of Nayland Smith.

The bed stood fully four feet from the nearest window.

I suppose the question was written in my face; for, as I turned again

to Smith, who, having struggled upright, was still fingering his

injured throat ruefully--"God only knows, Petrie!" he said; "no human

arm could have reached me...."

For us, the night was ended so far as sleep was concerned. Arrayed in

his dressing-gown, Smith sat in the white cane chair in my study with

a glass of brandy and water beside him, and (despite my official

prohibition) with the cracked briar, which had sent up its incense in

many strange and dark places of the East and which yet survived to

perfume these prosy rooms in suburban London, between his teeth. I

stood with my elbow resting upon the mantelpiece looking down at him

where he sat.

"By God! Petrie," he said, yet again, with his fingers straying gently

over the surface of his throat, "that was a narrow shave--a damned

narrow shave!"

"Narrower than perhaps you appreciate, old man," I replied. "You were

a most unusual shade of blue when I found you...."

"I managed," said Smith evenly, "to tear those clutching fingers away

for a moment and to give a cry for help. It was only for a moment,

though. Petrie! they were fingers of steel--of steel!"

"The bed...." I began.

"I know that," rapped Smith. "I shouldn't have been sleeping in it,

had it been within reach of the window; but, knowing that the Doctor

avoids noisy methods, I had thought myself fairly safe so long as I

made it impossible for any one actually to enter the room...."

"I have always insisted, Smith," I cried, "that there was danger! What

of poisoned darts? What of the damnable reptiles and insects which

form part of the armoury of Fu-Manchu?"

"Familiarity breeds contempt, I suppose," he replied. "But as it

happened, none of those agents was employed. The very menace that I

sought to avoid reached me somehow. It would almost seem that Dr.

Fu-Manchu deliberately accepted the challenge of those screwed up

windows! Hang it all, Petrie! one cannot sleep in a room hermetically

sealed in weather like this! It's positively Burmese; and although I

can stand tropical heat, curiously enough the heat of London gets me

down almost immediately."

"The humidity; that's easily understood. But you'll have to put up

with it in the future. After nightfall our windows must be closed

entirely, Smith."

Nayland Smith knocked out his pipe upon the side of the fireplace. The

bowl sizzled furiously, but without delay he stuffed broad-cut mixture

into the hot pipe, dropping a liberal quantity upon the carpet during

the process. He raised his eyes to me, and his face was very grim.

"Petrie," he said, striking a match on the heel of his slipper, "the

resources of Dr. Fu-Manchu are by no means exhausted. Before we quit

this room it is up to us to come to a decision upon a certain point."

He got his pipe well alight. "What kind of thing, what unnatural,

distorted creature, laid hands upon my throat to-night? I owe my life,

primarily, to you, old man, but secondarily, to the fact that I was

awakened, just before the attack, by the creature's \_coughing\_--by its

vile, high pitched \_coughing\_...."

I glanced around at the books upon my shelves. Often enough, following

some outrage by the brilliant, Chinese doctor whose genius was

directed to the discovery of new and unique death agents, we had

obtained a clue in those works of a scientific nature which bulk

largely in the library of a medical man. There are creatures, there

are drugs, which, ordinarily innocuous, may be so employed as to

become inimical to human life; and in the distorting of nature, in the

disturbing of balances and the diverting of beneficent forces into

strange and dangerous channels, Dr. Fu-Manchu excelled. I had known

him to enlarge, by artificial culture, a minute species of fungus so

as to render it a powerful agent capable of attacking man; his

knowledge of venomous insects has probably never been paralleled in

the history of the world; whilst, in the sphere of pure toxicology, he

had, and has, no rival: the Borgias were children by comparison. But,

look where I would, think how I might, no adequate explanation of this

latest outrage seemed possible along normal lines.

"There's the clue," said Nayland Smith, pointing to a little ash-tray

upon the table near by. "Follow it if you can."

But I could not.

"As I have explained," continued my friend, "I was awakened by a sound

of coughing; then came a death grip on my throat, and instinctively my

hands shot out in search of my attacker. I could not reach him; my

hands came in contact with nothing palpable. Therefore I clutched at

the fingers which were dug into my windpipe, and found them to be

small--as the marks show--and \_hairy\_. I managed to give that first

cry for help, and with all my strength I tried to unfasten the grip

that was throttling the life out of me. At last I contrived to move

one of the hands, and I called out again, though not so loudly. Then

both the hands were back again; I was weakening; but I clawed like a

madman at the thin, hairy arms of the strangling thing, and with a

blood-red mist dancing before my eyes, I seemed to be whirling madly

round and round until all became a blank. Evidently I used my nails

pretty freely--and there's the trophy."

For the twentieth time, I should think, I raised the ash-tray in my

hand and held it immediately under the table lamp in order to examine

its contents. In the little brass bowl lay a blood-stained fragment of

greyish hair attached to a tatter of skin. This fragment of epidermis

had an odd bluish tinge, and the attached hair was much darker at the

roots than elsewhere. Saving its singular colour, it might have been

torn from the forearm of a very hirsute human; but although my

thoughts wandered, unfettered, north, south, east and west; although,

knowing the resources of Fu-Manchu, I considered all the recognized

Mongolian types, and, in quest of hirsute mankind, even roamed, far

north among the blubber-eating Esquimaux; although I glanced at

Australasia, at Central Africa, and passed in mental review the dark

places of the Congo, nowhere in the known world, nowhere in the

history of the human species, could I come upon a type of man

answering to the description suggested by our strange clue.

Nayland Smith was watching me curiously as I bent over the little

brass ash-tray.

"You are puzzled," he rapped in his short way. "So am I--utterly

puzzled. Fu-Manchu's gallery of monstrosities clearly has become

reinforced; for even if we identified the type, we should not be in

sight of our explanation."

"You mean--" I began.

"Fully four feet from the window, Petrie, and that window but a few

inches open! Look"--he bent forward, resting his chest against the

table, and stretched out his hand towards me--"you have a rule there;

just measure."

Setting down the ash-tray, I opened out the rule and measured the

distance from the farther edge of the table to the tips of Smith's

fingers.

"Twenty-eight inches--and \_I\_ have a long reach!" snapped Smith,

withdrawing his arm and striking a match to relight his pipe. "There's

one thing, Petrie, often proposed before, which now we must do without

delay. The ivy must be stripped from the walls at the back. It's a

pity, but we cannot afford to sacrifice our lives to our sense of the

æsthetic. What do you make of the sound like the cracking of a whip?"

"I make nothing of it, Smith," I replied wearily. "It might have been

a thick branch of ivy breaking beneath the weight of a climber."

"Did it sound like it?"

"I must confess that the explanation does not convince me, but I have

no better one."

Smith, permitting his pipe to go out, sat staring straightly before

him, and tugging at the lobe of his left ear.

"The old bewilderment is seizing me," I continued. "At first, when I

realized that Dr. Fu-Manchu was back in England, when I realized that

an elaborate murder-machine was set up somewhere in London, it seemed

unreal, fantastical. Then I met--Kâramanèh! She, whom we thought to be

his victim, showed herself again to be his slave. Now, with Weymouth

and Scotland Yard at work, the old secret evil is established again in

our midst, unaccountably--our lives are menaced--sleep is a

danger--every shadow threatens death ... oh! it is awful."

Smith remained silent; he did not seem to have heard my words. I knew

these moods and had learnt that it was useless to seek to interrupt

them. With his brows drawn down, and his deep-set eyes staring into

space, he sat there gripping his cold pipe so tightly that my own jaw

muscles ached sympathetically. No man was better equipped than this

gaunt British Commissioner to stand between society and the menace of

the Yellow Doctor; I respected his meditations, for, unlike my own,

they were informed by an intimate knowledge of the dark and secret

things of the East, of that mysterious East out of which Fu-Manchu

came, of that jungle of noxious things whose miasma had been wafted

Westward with the implacable Chinaman.

I walked quietly from the room, occupied with my own bitter

reflections.

CHAPTER XV

BEWITCHMENT

"You say you have two pieces of news for me?" said Nayland Smith,

looking across the breakfast table to where Inspector Weymouth sat

sipping coffee.

"There are two points--yes," replied the Scotland Yard man, whilst

Smith paused, egg-spoon in hand, and fixed his keen eyes upon the

speaker. "The first is this: the headquarters of the yellow group is

no longer in the East End."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"For two reasons. In the first place, that district must now be too

hot to hold Dr. Fu-Manchu; in the second place, we have just completed

a house-to-house inquiry which has scarcely overlooked a rathole or a

rat. That place where you say Fu-Manchu was visited by some Chinese

mandarin; where you, Mr. Smith, and"--glancing in my direction--"you,

doctor, were confined for a time--"

"Yes?" snapped Smith, attacking his egg.

"Well," continued the Inspector, "it is all deserted now. There is not

the slightest doubt that the Chinaman has fled to some other abode. I

am certain of it. My second piece of news will interest you very much,

I am sure. You were taken to the establishment of the Chinaman,

Shen-Yan, by a certain ex-officer of New York Police--Burke...."

"Good God!" cried Smith, looking up with a start; "I thought they had

him!"

"So did I," replied Weymouth grimly; "but they haven't! He got away in

the confusion following the raid, and has been hiding ever since with

a cousin--a nurseryman out Upminster way...."

"Hiding?" snapped Smith.

"Exactly--hiding. He has been afraid to stir ever since, and has

scarcely shown his nose outside the door. He says he is watched night

and day."

"Then how ...!"

"He realized that something must be done," continued the Inspector,

"and made a break this morning. He is so convinced of this constant

surveillance that he came away secretly, hidden under the boxes of a

market-wagon. He landed at Covent Garden in the early hours of this

morning and came straight away to the Yard."

"What is he afraid of exactly?"

Inspector Weymouth put down his coffee cup and bent forward slightly.

"He knows something," he said in a low voice, "and \_they\_ are aware

that he knows it!"

"And what is this he knows?"

Nayland Smith stared eagerly at the detective.

"Every man has his price," replied Weymouth, with a smile, "and Burke

seems to think that you are a more likely market than the police

authorities."

"I see," snapped Smith. "He wants to see \_me\_?"

"He wants you to go and see \_him\_," was the reply. "I think he

anticipates that you may make a capture of the person or persons

spying upon him."

"Did he give you any particulars?"

"Several. He spoke of a sort of gipsy girl with whom he had a short

conversation one day, over the fence which divides his cousin's flower

plantations from the lane adjoining."

"Gipsy girl!" I whispered, glancing rapidly at Smith.

"I think you are right, doctor," said Weymouth with his slow smile;

"it was Kâramanèh. She asked him the way to somewhere or other and got

him to write it upon a loose page of his notebook, so that she should

not forget it."

"You hear that, Petrie?" rapped Smith.

"I hear it," I replied, "but I don't see any special significance in

the fact."

"I do!" rapped Smith. "I didn't sit up the greater part of last night

thrashing my weary brains for nothing! But I am going to the British

Museum to-day, to confirm a certain suspicion." He turned to Weymouth.

"Did Burke go back?" he demanded abruptly.

"He returned hidden under the empty boxes," was the reply. "Oh! you

never saw a man in such a funk in all your life!"

"He may have good reasons," I said.

"He \_has\_ good reasons!" replied Nayland Smith grimly; "if that man

really possesses information inimical to the safety of Fu-Manchu, he

can only escape doom by means of a miracle similar to that which

hitherto has protected you and me."

"Burke insists," said Weymouth at this point, "that something comes

almost every night after dusk, slinking about the house--it's an old

farmhouse, I understand; and on two or three occasions he has been

awakened (fortunately for him he is a light sleeper) by sounds of

\_coughing\_ immediately outside his window. He is a man who sleeps with

a pistol under his pillow, and more than once, on running to the

window, he has had a vague glimpse of some creature leaping down from

the tiles of the roof, which slopes up to his room, into the flower

beds below...."

"Creature!" said Smith, his grey eyes ablaze now, "you said

\_creature\_!"

"I used the word deliberately," replied Weymouth, "because Burke seems

to have the idea that it goes on all fours."

There was a short and rather strained silence. Then:

"In descending a sloping roof," I suggested, "a human being would

probably employ his hands as well as his feet."

"Quite so," agreed the Inspector. "I am merely reporting the

impression of Burke."

"Has he heard no other sound?" rapped Smith; "one like the cracking of

dry branches, for instance?"

"He made no mention of it," replied Weymouth, staring.

"And what is the plan?"

"One of his cousin's vans," said Weymouth, with his slight smile, "has

remained behind at Covent Garden and will return late this afternoon.

I propose that you and I, Mr. Smith, imitate Burke and ride down to

Upminster under the empty boxes."

Nayland Smith stood up, leaving his breakfast half finished, and began

to wander up and down the room, reflectively tugging at his ear. Then

he began to fumble in the pockets of his dressing-gown and finally

produced the inevitable pipe, dilapidated pouch, and box of safety

matches. He began to load the much-charred agent of reflection.

"Do I understand that Burke is actually too afraid to go out openly

even in daylight?" he asked suddenly.

"He has not hitherto left his cousin's plantations at all," replied

Weymouth. "He seems to think that openly to communicate with the

authorities, or with you, would be to seal his death warrant."

"He's right," snapped Smith.

"Therefore he came and returned secretly," continued the inspector;

"and if we are to do any good, obviously we must adopt similar

precautions. The market wagon, loaded in such a way as to leave ample

space in the interior for us, will be drawn up outside the office of

Messrs. Pike and Pike, in Covent Garden, until about five o'clock this

afternoon. At say, half-past four, I propose that we meet there and

embark upon the journey."

The speaker glanced in my direction interrogatively.

"Include me in the programme," I said. "Will there be room in the

wagon?"

"Certainly," was the reply; "it is most commodious, but I cannot

guarantee its comfort."

Nayland Smith promenaded the room unceasingly, and presently he walked

out altogether, only to return ere the Inspector and I had had time to

exchange more than a glance of surprise, carrying a brass ash-tray. He

placed this on a corner of the breakfast table before Weymouth.

"Ever seen anything like that?" he inquired.

The Inspector examined the gruesome relic with obvious curiosity,

turning it over with the tip of his little finger and manifesting

considerable repugnance in touching it at all. Smith and I watched him

in silence, and, finally, placing the tray again upon the table, he

looked up in a puzzled way.

"It's something like the skin of a water-rat," he said.

Nayland Smith stared at him fixedly.

"A water-rat? Now that you come to mention it, I perceive a certain

resemblance--yes. But"--he had been wearing a silk scarf about his

throat and now he unwrapped it--"did you ever see a water-rat that

could make marks like these?"

Weymouth started to his feet with some muttered exclamation.

"What is this?" he cried. "When did it happen, and how?"

In his own terse fashion, Nayland Smith related the happenings of the

night. At the conclusion of the story:

"By heaven!" whispered Weymouth, "the thing on the roof--the coughing

thing that goes on all fours, seen by Burke...."

"My own idea exactly!" cried Smith.

"Fu-Manchu," I said excitedly, "has brought some new, some dreadful

creature, from Burma...."

"No, Petrie," snapped Smith, turning upon me suddenly. "Not from

Burma--from Abyssinia."

\* \* \* \* \*

That day was destined to be an eventful one; a day never to be

forgotten by any of us concerned in those happenings which I have to

record. Early in the morning Nayland Smith set off for the British

Museum to pursue his mysterious investigations, and I, having

performed my brief professional round (for, as Nayland Smith had

remarked on one occasion, this was a beastly healthy district), I

found, having made the necessary arrangements, that, with over three

hours to spare, I had nothing to occupy my time until the appointment

in Covent Garden Market. My lonely lunch completed, a restless fit

seized me, and I felt unable to remain longer in the house. Inspired

by this restlessness, I attired myself for the adventure of the

evening, not neglecting to place a pistol in my pocket, and, walking

to the neighbouring Tube station, I booked to Charing Cross, and

presently found myself rambling aimlessly along the crowded streets.

Led on by what link of memory I know not, I presently drifted into New

Oxford Street, and looked up with a start--to learn that I stood

before the shop of a second-hand bookseller where once two years

before I had met Kâramanèh.

The thoughts conjured up at that moment were almost too bitter to be

borne, and without so much as glancing at the books displayed for

sale, I crossed the roadway, entered Museum Street, and, rather in

order to distract my mind than because I contemplated any purchase,

began to examine the Oriental pottery, Egyptian statuettes, Indian

armour, and other curios, displayed in the window of an antique

dealer.

But, strive as I would to concentrate my mind upon the objects in the

window, my memories persistently haunted me, and haunted me to the

exclusion even of the actualities. The crowds thronging the pavement,

the traffic in New Oxford Street, swept past unheeded; my eyes saw

nothing of pot nor statuette, but only met, in a misty imaginative

world, the glance of two other eyes--the dark and beautiful eyes of

Kâramanèh. In the exquisite tinting of a Chinese vase dimly

perceptible in the background of the shop, I perceived only the

blushing cheeks of Kâramanèh; her face rose up, a taunting phantom,

from out of the darkness between a hideous, gilded idol and an Indian

sandal-wood screen.

I strove to dispel this obsessing thought, resolutely fixing my

attention upon a tall Etruscan vase in the corner of the window, near

to the shop door. Was I losing my senses indeed? A doubt of my own

sanity momentarily possessed me. For, struggle as I would to dispel

the illusion--there, looking out at me over that ancient piece of

pottery, was the bewitching face of the slave-girl!

Probably I was glaring madly, and possibly I attracted the notice of

the passers-by; but of this I cannot be certain, for all my attention

was centred upon that phantasmal face, with the cloudy hair, slightly

parted red lips, and the brilliant dark eyes which looked into mine

out of the shadows of the shop.

It was bewildering--it was uncanny; for, delusion or verity, the

glamour prevailed. I exerted a great mental effort, stepped to the

door, turned the handle, and entered the shop with as great a show of

composure as I could muster.

A curtain draped in a little door at the back of one counter swayed

slightly, with no greater violence than may have been occasioned by

the draught. But I fixed my eyes upon this swaying curtain almost

fiercely ... as an impassive half-caste of some kind who appeared to

be a strange cross between a Græco-Hebrew and a Japanese, entered and

quite unemotionally faced me, with a slight bow.

So wholly unexpected was this apparition that I started back.

"Can I show you anything, sir?" inquired the new arrival, with a

second slight inclination of the head.

I looked at him for a moment in silence. Then:

"I thought I saw a lady of my acquaintance here a moment ago," I said.

"Was I mistaken?"

"Quite mistaken, sir," replied the shopman, raising his black eyebrows

ever so slightly; "a mistake possibly due to a reflection in the

window. Will you take a look around now that you are here?"

"Thank you," I replied, staring him hard in the face; "at some other

time."

I turned and quitted the shop abruptly. Either I was mad, or Kâramanèh

was concealed somewhere therein.

However, realizing my helplessness in the matter, I contented myself

with making a mental note of the name which appeared above the

establishment--J. Salaman--and walked on, my mind in a chaotic

condition and my heart beating with unusual rapidity.

CHAPTER XVI

THE QUESTING HANDS

Within my view, from the corner of the room where I sat in deepest

shadow, through the partly opened window (it was screwed, like our

own) were rows of glass-houses gleaming in the moonlight, and, beyond

them, orderly ranks of flower-beds extending into a blue haze of

distance. By reason of the moon's position, no light entered the room,

but my eyes, from long watching, were grown familiar with the

darkness, and I could see Burke quite clearly as he lay in the bed

between my post and the window. I seemed to be back again in those

days of the troubled past when first Nayland Smith and I had come to

grips with the servants of Dr. Fu-Manchu. A more peaceful scene than

this flower-planted corner of Essex it would be difficult to imagine;

but, either because of my knowledge that its peace was chimerical, or

because of that outflung consciousness of danger which actually, or in

my imagination, preceded the coming of the Chinaman's agents, to my

seeming the silence throbbed electrically and the night was laden with

stilly omens.

Already cramped by my journey in the market-cart, I found it difficult

to remain very long in any one position. What information had Burke to

sell? He had refused, for some reason, to discuss the matter that

evening, and now, enacting the part allotted him by Nayland Smith, he

feigned sleep consistently, although at intervals he would whisper to

me his doubts and fears.

All the chances were in our favour to-night; for whilst I could not

doubt that Dr. Fu-Manchu was set upon the removal of the ex-officer of

New York police, neither could I doubt that our presence in the farm

was unknown to the agents of the Chinaman. According to Burke,

constant attempts had been made to achieve Fu-Manchu's purpose, and

had only been frustrated by his (Burke's) wakefulness. There was every

probability that another attempt would be made to-night.

Any one who has been forced by circumstance to undertake such a vigil

as this will be familiar with the marked changes (corresponding with

phases of the earth's movement) which take place in the atmosphere, at

midnight, at two o'clock, and again at four o'clock. During those four

hours falls a period wherein all life is at its lowest ebb, and every

physician is aware that there is a greater likelihood of a patient's

passing between midnight and 4 a.m., than at any other period during

the cycle of the hours.

To-night I became specially aware of this lowering of vitality, and

now, with the night at that darkest phase which precedes the dawn, an

indescribable dread, such as I had known before in my dealings with

the Chinaman, assailed me, when I was least prepared to combat it. The

stillness was intense Then:

"\_Here it is!\_" whispered Burke from the bed.

The chill at the very centre of my being, which but corresponded with

the chill of all surrounding nature at that hour, became intensified,

keener, at the whispered words.

I rose stealthily out of my chair, and from my nest of shadows

watched--watched intently, the bright oblong of the window....

Without the slightest heralding sound--a black silhouette crept up

against the pane ... the silhouette of a small, malformed head, a

dog-like head, deep-set in square shoulders. Malignant eyes peered

intently in. Higher it rose--that wicked head--against the window,

then crouched down on the sill and became less sharply defined as the

creature stooped to the opening below. There was a faint sound of

sniffing.

Judging from the stark horror which I experienced myself, I doubted,

now, if Burke could sustain the rôle allotted him. In beneath the

slightly raised window came a hand, perceptible to me despite the

darkness of the room. It seemed to project from the black silhouette

outside the pane, to be thrust forward--and forward--and forward ...

that small hand with the outstretched fingers.

The unknown possesses unique terrors; and since I was unable to

conceive what manner of thing this could be, which, extending its

incredibly long arms, now sought the throat of the man upon the bed, I

tasted of that sort of terror which ordinarily one knows only in

dreams.

"Quick, sir--\_quick\_!" screamed Burke, starting up from the pillow.

The questing hands had reached his throat!

Choking down an urgent dread that I had of touching the thing which

had reached through the window to kill the sleeper, I sprang across

the room and grasped the rigid, hairy forearms.

Heavens! Never have I felt such muscles, such tendons, as those

beneath the hirsute skin! They seemed to be of steel wire, and with a

sudden frightful sense of impotence, I realized that I was as

powerless as a child to relax that strangle-hold. Burke was making the

most frightful sounds and quite obviously was being asphyxiated before

my eyes!

"Smith!" I cried, "Smith! Help! \_help\_! for God's sake!"

Despite the confusion of my mind I became aware of sounds outside and

below me. Twice the thing at the window coughed; there was an

incessant, lash-like cracking, then some shouted words which I was

unable to make out; and finally the sharp report of a pistol.

Snarling like that of a wild beast came from the creature with the

hairy arms, together with renewed coughing. But the steel grip relaxed

not one iota. I realized two things: the first, that in my terror at

the suddenness of the attack I had omitted to act as prearranged: the

second, that I had discredited the strength of the visitant, whilst

Smith had foreseen it.

Desisting in my vain endeavour to pit my strength against that of the

nameless thing, I sprang back across the room and took up the weapon

which had been left in my charge earlier in the night, but which I had

been unable to believe it would be necessary to employ. This was a

sharp and heavy axe which Nayland Smith, when I had met him in Covent

Garden, had brought with him, to the great amazement of Weymouth and

myself.

As I leapt back to the window and uplifted this primitive weapon, a

second shot sounded from below, and more fierce snarling, coughing,

and guttural mutterings assailed my ears from beyond the pane.

Lifting the heavy blade, I brought it down with all my strength upon

the nearer of those hairy arms where it crossed the window-ledge,

severing muscle, tendon and bone as easily as a knife might cut

cheese....

A shriek--a shriek neither human nor animal, but gruesomely compound

of both--followed ... and merged into a choking cough. Like a flash

the other shaggy arm was withdrawn, and some vaguely seen body went

rolling down the sloping red tiles and crashed on to the ground

beneath.

With a second piercing shriek, louder than that recently uttered by

Burke, wailing through the night from somewhere below, I turned

desperately to the man on the bed, who now was become significantly

silent. A candle with matches, stood upon a table hard by, and, my

fingers far from steady, I set about obtaining a light. This

accomplished, I stood the candle upon the little chest-of-drawers and

returned to Burke's side.

"Merciful God!" I cried.

Of all the pictures which remain in my memory, some of them dark

enough, I can find none more horrible than that which now confronted

me in the dim candle-light. Burke lay crosswise on the bed, his head

thrown back and sagging; one rigid hand he held in the air, and with

the other grasped the hairy forearm which I had severed with the axe;

for, in a death-like grip, the dead fingers were still fastened,

vice-like, at his throat.

His face was nearly black, and his eyes projected from their sockets

horribly. Mastering my repugnance, I seized the hideous piece of

bleeding anatomy and strove to release it. It defied all my efforts;

in death it was as implacable as in life. I took a knife from my

pocket, and, tendon by tendon, cut away that uncanny grip from Burke's

throat....

But my labour was in vain. Burke was dead!

I think I failed to realize this for some time. My clothes were

sticking clammily to my body; I was bathed in perspiration, and,

shaking furiously, I clutched at the edge of the window, avoiding the

bloody patch upon the ledge, and looked out over the roofs to where,

in the more distant plantations, I could hear excited voices. What had

been the meaning of that scream which I had heard but to which in my

frantic state of mind I had paid comparatively little attention?

There was a great stirring all about me.

"Smith!" I cried from the window; "Smith, for mercy's sake where are

you?"

Footsteps came racing up the stairs. Behind me the door burst open and

Nayland Smith stumbled into the room.

"God!" he said, and started back in the doorway.

"Have you got it, Smith?" I demanded hoarsely. "In sanity's name what

is it--\_what is it?\_"

"Come downstairs," replied Smith quietly, "and see for yourself." He

turned his head aside from the bed.

Very unsteadily I followed him down the stairs and through the

rambling old house out into the stone-paved courtyard. There were

figures moving at the end of a long alleyway between the glass houses,

and one, carrying a lantern, stooped over something which lay upon the

ground.

"That's Burke's cousin with the lantern," whispered Smith, in my ear;

"don't tell him yet."

I nodded, and we hurried up to join the group. I found myself looking

down at one of those thickset Burmans whom I always associated with

Fu-Manchu's activities. He lay quite flat, face downward; but the back

of his head was a shapeless blood-clotted mass, and a heavy

stock-whip, the butt end ghastly because of the blood and hair which

clung to it, lay beside him. I started back appalled as Smith caught

my arm.

"\_It\_ turned on its keeper!" he hissed in my ear. "I wounded it twice

from below, and you severed one arm; in its insensate fury, its

unreasoning malignity, it returned--and there lies its second

victim...."

"Then...."

"It's gone, Petrie! It has the strength of four men even now. Look!"

He stooped, and from the clenched left hand of the dead Burman,

extracted a piece of paper and opened it.

"Hold the lantern a moment," he said.

In the yellow light he glanced at the scrap of paper.

"As I expected--a leaf of Burke's notebook; it worked by \_scent\_." He

turned to me with an odd expression in his grey eyes. "I wonder what

piece of \_my\_ personal property Fu-Manchu has pilfered," he said, "in

order to enable it to sleuth \_me\_?"

He met the gaze of the man holding the lantern.

"Perhaps you had better return to the house," he said, looking him

squarely in the eyes.

The other's face blanched.

"You don't mean, sir--you don't mean...."

"Brace up!" said Smith, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"Remember--he chose to play with fire!"

One wild look the man cast from Smith to me, then went off,

staggering, toward the farm.

"Smith--" I began.

He turned to me with an impatient gesture.

"Weymouth has driven into Upminster," he snapped; "and the whole

district will be scoured before morning. They probably motored here,

but the sounds of the shots will have enabled whoever was with the car

to make good his escape. And--exhausted from loss of blood, its

capture is only a matter of time, Petrie."

CHAPTER XVII

ONE DAY IN RANGOON

Nayland Smith returned from the telephone. Nearly twenty-four hours

had elapsed since the awful death of Burke.

"No news, Petrie," he said shortly. "It must have crept into some

inaccessible hole to die."

I glanced up from my notes. Smith settled into the white cane

armchair, and began to surround himself with clouds of aromatic smoke.

I took up a half-sheet of foolscap covered with pencilled writing in

my friend's cramped characters, and transcribed the following, in

order to complete my account of the latest Fu-Manchu outrage:

"The Amharûn, a Semitic tribe allied to the Falashas, who have been

settled for many generations in the southern province of Shoa

(Abyssinia), have been regarded as unclean and outcast, apparently

since the days of Menelek--son of Suleyman and the Queen of

Sheba--from whom they claim descent. Apart from their custom of eating

meat cut from living beasts, they are accursed because of their

alleged association with the \_Cynocephalus hamadryas\_ (Sacred Baboon).

I, myself, was taken to a hut on the banks of the Hawash and shown a

creature ... whose predominant trait was an unreasoning malignity

toward ... and a ferocious tenderness for the society of its furry

brethren. Its powers of \_scent\_ were fully equal to those of a

bloodhound, whilst its abnormally long forearms possessed incredible

strength ... a \_Cynocephalyte\_ such as this, contracts phthisis even

in the more northern provinces of Abyssinia...."

"You have not yet explained to me, Smith," I said, having completed

this note, "how you got in touch with Fu-Manchu; how you learnt that

he was not dead, as we had supposed, but living--active."

Nayland Smith stood up and fixed his steely eyes upon me with an

indefinable expression in them. Then:

"No," he replied; "I haven't. Do you wish to know?"

"Certainly," I said with surprise; "is there any reason why I should

not?"

"There is no real reason," said Smith; "or"--staring at me very

hard--"I hope there is no real reason."

"What do you mean?"

"Well"--he grabbed up his pipe from the table and began furiously to

load it--"I blundered upon the truth one day in Rangoon. I was

walking out of a house which I occupied there for a time, and as I

swung around the corner into the main street, I ran into--literally

ran into...."

Again he hesitated oddly; then closed up his pouch and tossed it into

the cane chair. He struck a match.

"I ran into Kâramanèh," he continued abruptly, and began to puff away

at his pipe, filling the air with clouds of tobacco smoke.

I caught my breath. This was the reason why he had kept me so long in

ignorance of the story. He knew of my hopeless, uncrushable sentiments

towards the gloriously beautiful but utterly hypocritical and evil

Eastern girl who was perhaps the most dangerous of all Dr. Fu-Manchu's

servants; for the power of her loveliness was magical, as I knew to my

cost.

"What did you do?" I asked quietly, my fingers drumming upon the

table.

"Naturally enough," continued Smith, "with a cry of recognition I held

out both my hands to her gladly. I welcomed her as a dear friend

regained; I thought of the joy with which \_you\_ would learn that I had

found the missing one; I thought how you would be in Rangoon just as

quickly as the fastest steamer would get you there...."

"Well?"

"Kâramanèh started back and treated me to a glance of absolute

animosity! No recognition was there, and no friendliness--only a sort

of scornful anger."

He shrugged his shoulders and began to walk up and down the room.

"I do not know what \_you\_ would have done in the circumstances,

Petrie, but I--"

"Yes?"

"I dealt with the situation rather promptly, I think. I simply picked

her up without another word, right there in the public street, and

raced back into the house, with her kicking and fighting like a

little demon! She did not shriek or do anything of that kind, but

fought silently like a vicious wild animal. Oh! I had some scars, I

assure you; but I carried her up into my office, which fortunately was

empty at the time, plumped her down in a chair, and stood looking at

her."

"Go on" I said rather hollowly; "what next?"

"She glared at me with those wonderful eyes, an expression of

implacable hatred in them! Remembering all that we had done for her;

remembering our former friendship; above all, remembering \_you\_--this

look of hers almost made me shiver. She was dressed very smartly in

European fashion, and the whole thing had been so sudden that as I

stood looking at her I half expected to wake up presently and find it

all a day-dream. But it was real--as real as her enmity. I felt the

need for reflection, and having vainly endeavoured to draw her into

conversation, and elicited no other answer than this glare of

hatred--I left her there, going out and locking the door behind me."

"Very high-handed?"

"A Commissioner has certain privileges, Petrie; and any action I might

choose to take was not likely to be questioned. There was only one

window to the office, and it was fully twenty feet above the level; it

overlooked a narrow street off the main thoroughfare (I think I have

explained that the house stood on a corner), so I did not fear her

escaping. I had an important engagement which I had been on my way to

fulfil when the encounter took place, and now, with a word to my

native servant--who chanced to be downstairs--I hurried off."

Smith's pipe had gone out as usual, and he proceeded to relight it,

whilst, my eyes lowered, I continued to drum upon the table.

"This boy took her some tea later in the afternoon," he continued,

"and apparently found her in a more placid frame of mind. I returned

immediately after dusk, and he reported that when last he had looked

in, about half an hour earlier, she had been seated in an armchair

reading a newspaper (I may mention that everything of value in the

office was securely locked up!). I was determined upon a certain

course by this time, and I went slowly upstairs, unlocked the door,

and walked into the darkened office. I turned up the light ... the

place was empty!"

"Empty!"

"The window was open, and the bird flown! Oh! it was not so simple a

flight--as you would realize if you knew the place. The street, which

the window overlooked, was bounded by a blank wall, on the opposite

side, for thirty or forty yards along; and as we had been having heavy

rains, it was full of glutinous mud. Furthermore, the boy whom I had

left in charge had been sitting in the doorway immediately below the

office window watching for my return ever since his last visit to the

room above...."

"She must have bribed him," I said bitterly, "or corrupted him with

her infernal blandishments."

"I'll swear she did not," rapped Smith decisively. "I know my man, and

I'll swear she did not. There were no marks in the mud of the road to

show that a ladder had been placed there; moreover, nothing of the

kind could have been attempted whilst the boy was sitting in the

doorway; that was evident. In short, she did not descend into the

roadway and did not come out by the door...."

"Was there a gallery outside the window?"

"No; it was impossible to climb to right or left of the window or up

on to the roof. I convinced myself of that."

"But, my dear man!" I cried, "you are eliminating every natural mode

of egress! Nothing remains but flight."

"I am aware, Petrie, that nothing remains but flight; in other words,

I have never to this day understood how she quitted the room. I only

know that she did."

"And then?"

"I saw in this incredible escape the cunning hand of Dr.

Fu-Manchu--saw it at once. Peace was ended; and I set to work along

certain channels without delay. In this manner I got on the track at

last, and learnt, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the Chinese

doctor lived--nay! was actually on his way to Europe again!"

There followed a short silence. Then--

"I suppose it's a mystery that will be cleared up some day," concluded

Smith; "but to date the riddle remains intact." He glanced at the

clock. "I have an appointment with Weymouth; therefore, leaving you to

the task of solving this problem which thus far has defied my own

efforts, I will get along."

He read a query in my glance.

"Oh! I shall not be late," he added; "I think I may venture out alone

on this occasion without personal danger."

Nayland Smith went upstairs to dress, leaving me seated at my

writing-table deep in thought. My notes upon the renewed activity of

Dr. Fu-Manchu were stacked on my left hand, and, opening a new

writing-block, I commenced to add to them particulars of this

surprising event in Rangoon which properly marked the opening of the

Chinaman's second campaign. Smith looked in at the door on his way

out, but seeing me thus engaged, did not disturb me.

I think I have made it sufficiently evident in these records that my

practice was not an extensive one, and my hour for receiving patients

arrived and passed with only two professional interruptions.

My task concluded, I glanced at the clock, and determined to devote

the remainder of the evening to a little private investigation of my

own. From Nayland Smith I had preserved the matter a secret, largely

because I feared his ridicule; but I had by no means forgotten that I

had seen, or had strongly imagined that I had seen, Kâramanèh--that

beautiful anomaly who (in modern London) asserted herself to be a

slave--in the shop of an antique dealer not a hundred yards from the

British Museum!

A theory was forming in my brain, which I was burningly anxious to put

to the test. I remembered how, two years before, I had met Kâramanèh

near to this same spot; and I had heard Inspector Weymouth assert

positively that Fu-Manchu's headquarters were no longer in the East

End, as of yore. There seemed to me to be a distinct probability that

a suitable centre had been established for his reception in this

place, so much less likely to be suspected by the authorities. Perhaps

I attached too great a value to what may have been a delusion; perhaps

my theory rested upon no more solid foundation than the belief that I

had seen Kâramanèh in the shop of the curio dealer. If her appearance

there should prove to have been imaginary, the structure of my theory

would be shattered at its base. To-night I should test my premises,

and upon the result of my investigations determine my future action.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SILVER BUDDHA

Museum Street certainly did not seem a likely spot for Dr. Fu-Manchu

to establish himself, yet, unless my imagination had strangely

deceived me, from the window of the antique dealer who traded under

the name of J. Salaman, those wonderful eyes of Kâramanèh, like the

velvet midnight of the Orient, had looked out at me.

As I paced slowly along the pavement toward that lighted window, my

heart was beating far from normally, and I cursed the folly which,

despite all, refused to die, but lingered on, poisoning my life.

Comparative quiet reigned in Museum Street, at no time a busy

thoroughfare, and, excepting another shop at the Museum end,

commercial activities had ceased there. The door of a block of

residential chambers almost immediately opposite to the shop which was

my objective, threw out a beam of light across the pavement; not more

than two or three people were visible upon either side of the street.

I turned the knob of the door and entered the shop.

The same dark and immobile individual whom I had seen before, and

whose nationality defied conjecture, came out from the curtained

doorway at the back to greet me.

"Good evening, sir," he said monotonously, with a slight inclination

of the head; "is there anything which you desire to inspect?"

"I merely wish to take a look round," I replied. "I have no particular

item in view."

The shopman inclined his head again, swept a yellow hand

comprehensively about, as if to include the entire stock, and seated

himself on a chair behind the counter.

I lighted a cigarette with such an air of nonchalance as I could

summon to the operation, and began casually to inspect the varied

articles of \_virtu\_ loading the shelves and tables about me. I am

bound to confess that I retain no one definite impression of this

tour. Vases I handled, statuettes, Egyptian scarabs, bead necklaces,

illuminated missals, portfolios of old prints, jade ornaments,

bronzes, fragments of rare lace, early printed books, Assyrian

tablets, daggers, Roman rings, and a hundred other curiosities,

leisurely, and I trust with apparent interest, yet without forming

the slightest impression respecting any one of them.

Probably I employed myself in this way for half an hour or more, and

whilst my hands busied themselves among the stock of J. Salaman, my

mind was occupied entirely elsewhere. Furtively I was studying the

shopman himself, a human presentment of a Chinese idol; I was

listening and watching: especially I was watching the curtained

doorway at the back of the shop.

"We close at about this time, sir," the man interrupted me, speaking

in the emotionless, monotonous voice which I had noted before.

I replaced upon the glass counter a little Sekhet boat, carved in wood

and highly coloured, and glanced up with a start. Truly my methods

were amateurish; I had learnt nothing; I was unlikely to learn

anything. I wondered how Nayland Smith would have conducted such an

inquiry, and I racked my brains for some means of penetrating into the

recesses of the establishment. Indeed I had been seeking such a plan

for the past half an hour, but my mind had proved incapable of

suggesting one.

Why I did not admit failure I cannot imagine, but, instead, I began to

tax my brains anew for some means of gaining further time; and, as I

looked about the place, the shopman very patiently awaiting my

departure, I observed an open case at the back of the counter. The

three lower shelves were empty, but upon the fourth shelf squatted a

silver Buddha.

"I should like to examine the silver image yonder," I said; "what

price are you asking for it?"

"It is not for sale, sir," replied the man, with a greater show of

animation than he had yet exhibited.

"Not for sale!" I said, my eyes ever seeking the curtained doorway;

"how's that?"

"It is sold."

"Well, even so, there can be no objection to my examining it?"

"It is not for sale, sir."

Such a rebuff from a tradesman would have been more than sufficient to

call for a sharp retort at any other time, but now it excited the

strangest suspicions. The street outside looked comparatively

deserted, and prompted, primarily, by an emotion which I did not pause

to analyse, I adopted a singular measure; without doubt I relied upon

the unusual powers vested in Nayland Smith to absolve me in the event

of error. I made as if to go out into the street, then turned, leapt

past the shopman, ran behind the counter, and grasped at the silver

Buddha!

That I was likely to be arrested for attempted larceny I cared not;

the idea that Kâramanèh was concealed somewhere in the building ruled

absolutely, and a theory respecting this silver image had taken

possession of my mind. Exactly what I expected to happen at that

moment I cannot say, but what actually happened was far more startling

than anything I could have imagined.

At the instant that I grasped the figure I realized that it was

attached to the woodwork; in the next I knew that it was a handle ...

as I tried to pull it toward me I became aware that this handle was

the handle of a door. For that door swung open before me, and I found

myself at the foot of a flight of heavily carpeted stairs.

Anxious as I had been to proceed a moment before, I was now trebly

anxious to retire, and for this reason: on the bottom step of the

stairs, facing me, \_stood Dr. Fu-Manchu!\_

CHAPTER XIX

DR. FU-MANCHU'S LABORATORY

I cannot conceive that any ordinary mortal ever attained to anything

like an intimacy with Dr. Fu-Manchu; I cannot believe that any man

could ever grow used to his presence, could ever cease to fear him. I

suppose I had set eyes upon Fu-Manchu some five or six times prior to

this occasion, and now he was dressed in the manner which I always

associated with him, probably because it was thus I first saw him. He

wore a plain yellow robe, and, his pointed chin resting upon his

bosom, he looked down at me, revealing a great expanse of the

marvellous brow with its sparse, neutral-coloured hair.

Never in my experience have I known such \_force\_ to dwell in the

glance of any human eye as dwelt in that of this uncanny being. His

singular affliction (if affliction it were), the film or slight

membrane which sometimes obscured the oblique eyes, was particularly

evident at the moment that I crossed the threshold, but now as I

looked up at Dr. Fu-Manchu, it lifted--revealing the eyes in all their

emerald greenness.

The idea of physical attack upon this incredible being seemed

childish--inadequate. But, following that first instant of

stupefaction, I forced myself to advance upon him.

A dull, crushing blow descended on the top of my skull, and I became

oblivious of all things.

My return to consciousness was accompanied by tremendous pains in my

head, whereby, from previous experience, I knew that a sandbag had

been used against me by some one in the shop, presumably by the

immobile shopman. This awakening was accompanied by none of those hazy

doubts respecting previous events and present surroundings which are

the usual symptoms of revival from sudden unconsciousness; even before

I opened my eyes, before I had more than a partial command of my

senses, I knew that, with my wrists handcuffed behind me, I lay in a

room which was also occupied by Dr. Fu-Manchu. This absolute certainty

of the Chinaman's presence was evidenced, not by my senses, but only

by an inner consciousness, and the same that always awakened into life

at the approach not only of Fu-Manchu in person but of certain of his

uncanny servants.

A faint perfume hung in the air about me; I do not mean that of any

essence or of any incense, but rather the smell which is suffused by

Oriental furniture, by Oriental draperies; the indefinable but

unmistakable perfume of the East.

Thus, London has a distinct smell of its own, and so has Paris, whilst

the difference between Marseilles and Suez, for instance, is even more

marked. Now the atmosphere surrounding me was Eastern, but not of the

East that I knew; rather it was Far Eastern. Perhaps I do not make

myself very clear, but to me there was a mysterious significance in

that perfumed atmosphere. I opened my eyes.

I lay upon a long low settee, in a fairly large room which was

furnished, as I had anticipated, in an absolutely Oriental fashion.

The two windows were so screened as to have lost, from the interior

point of view, all resemblance to European windows, and the whole

structure of the room had been altered in conformity, bearing out my

idea that the place had been prepared for Fu-Manchu's reception some

time before his actual return. I doubt if, East or West, a duplicate

of that singular apartment could be found.

The end in which I lay was, as I have said, typical of an Eastern

house, and a large, ornate lantern hung from the ceiling almost

directly above me. The farther end of the room was occupied by tall

cases, some of them containing books, but the majority filled with

scientific paraphernalia: rows of flasks and jars, frames of

test-tubes, retorts, scales, and other objects of the laboratory. At a

large and very finely carved table sat Dr. Fu-Manchu, a yellow and

faded volume open before him, and some dark red fluid, almost like

blood, bubbling in a test-tube which he held over the flame of a

Bunsen-burner.

The enormously long nail of his right index finger rested upon the

opened page of the book, to which he seemed constantly to refer,

dividing his attention between the volume, the contents of the

test-tube, and the progress of a second experiment, or possibly a part

of the same, which was taking place upon another corner of the

littered table.

A huge glass retort (the bulb was fully two feet in diameter), fitted

with a Liebig's Condenser, rested in a metal frame, and within the

bulb, floating in an oily substance, was a fungus some six inches

high, shaped like a toadstool, but of a brilliant and venomous orange

colour. Three flat tubes of light were so arranged as to cast violet

rays upward into the retort, and the receiver, wherein condensed the

product of this strange experiment, contained some drops of a red

fluid which may have been identical with that boiling in the

test-tube.

These things I perceived at a glance; then the filmy eyes of Dr.

Fu-Manchu were raised from the book, turned in my direction, and all

else was forgotten.

"I regret," came the sibilant voice, "that unpleasant measures were

necessary, but hesitation would have been fatal. I trust, Dr. Petrie,

that you suffer no inconvenience?"

To this speech no reply was possible, and I attempted none.

"You have long been aware of my esteem for your acquirements,"

continued the Chinaman, his voice occasionally touching deep guttural

notes, "and you will appreciate the pleasure which this visit affords

me. I kneel at the feet of my silver Buddha. I look to you, when you

shall have overcome your prejudices--due to ignorance of my true

motives--to assist me in establishing that intellectual control which

is destined to be the new World Force. I bear you no malice for your

ancient enmity, and even now"--he waved one yellow hand toward the

retort--"I am conducting an experiment designed to convert you from

your misunderstanding, and to adjust your perspective."

Quite unemotionally he spoke, then turned again to his book, his

test-tube and retort, in the most matter-of-fact way imaginable. I do

not think the most frenzied outburst on his part, the most fiendish

threats, could have produced such effect upon me as those cold and

carefully calculated words, spoken in that unique voice. In its tones,

in the glance of the green eyes, in the very pose of the gaunt,

high-shouldered body, there was power--force.

I counted myself lost, and in view of the Doctor's words, studied the

progress of the experiment with frightful interest. But a few moments

sufficed in which to realize that, for all my training, I knew as

little of Chemistry--of Chemistry as understood by this man's

genius--as a junior student in surgery knows of trephining. The

process in operation was a complete mystery to me; the means and the

end were alike incomprehensible.

Thus, in the heavy silence of that room, a silence only broken by the

regular bubbling from the test-tube, I found my attention straying

from the table to the other objects surrounding it; and at one of them

my gaze stopped and remained chained with horror.

It was a glass jar, some five feet in height and filled with viscous

fluid of a light amber colour. Out from this peered a hideous,

dog-like face, low-browed, with pointed ears and a nose almost

hoggishly flat. By the death-grin of the face the gleaming fangs were

revealed; and the body, the long yellow-grey body, rested, or seemed

to rest, upon short, malformed legs, whilst one long limp arm, the

right, hung down straightly in the preservative. The left arm had been

severed above the elbow.

Fu-Manchu, finding his experiment to be proceeding favourably, lifted

his eyes to me again.

"You are interested in my poor \_Cynocephalyte\_?" he said; and his eyes

were filmed like the eyes of one afflicted with cataract. "He was a

devoted servant, Dr. Petrie, but the lower influences in his genealogy

sometimes conquered. Then he got out of hand; and at last he was so

ungrateful toward those who had educated him, that, in one of those

paroxysms of his, he attacked and killed a most faithful Burman, one

of my oldest followers."

Fu-Manchu returned to his experiment.

Not the slightest emotion had he exhibited thus far, but had chatted

with me as any other scientist might chat with a friend who casually

visits his laboratory. The horror of the thing was playing havoc with

my own composure, however. There I lay, fettered, in the same room

with this man whose existence was a menace to the entire white race,

whilst placidly he pursued an experiment designed, if his own words

were believable, to cut me off from my kind--to wreak some change,

psychological or physiological I knew not; to place me, it might be,

upon a level with such brute things as that which now hung, half

floating, in the glass jar!

Something I know of the history of that ghastly specimen, that thing

neither man nor ape; for within my own knowledge had it not attempted

the life of Nayland Smith, and was it not \_I\_ who, with an axe, had

maimed it in the instant of one of its last slayings?

Of these things Dr. Fu-Manchu was well aware, so that his placid

speech was doubly, trebly horrible to my ears. I sought, furtively, to

move my arms, only to realize that, as I had anticipated, the

handcuffs were chained to a ring in the wall behind me. The

establishments of Dr. Fu-Manchu were always well provided with such

contrivances as these.

I uttered a short, harsh laugh. Fu-Manchu stood up slowly from the

table, and, placing the test-tube in a rack, deposited the latter

carefully upon a shelf at his side.

"I am happy to find you in such good humour," he said softly. "Other

affairs call me; and, in my absence, that profound knowledge of

chemistry, of which I have had evidence in the past, will enable you

to follow with intelligent interest the action of these violet rays

upon this exceptionally fine specimen of Siberian \_Amanita muscaria\_.

At some future time, possibly when you are my guest in China--which

country I am now making arrangements for you to visit--I shall discuss

with you some lesser-known properties of this species; and I may say

that one of your first tasks when you commence your duties as

assistant in my laboratory in Kiangsu, will be to conduct a series of

twelve experiments, which I have outlined, into other potentialities

of this unique fungus."

He walked quietly to a curtained doorway, with his catlike yet awkward

gait, lifted the drapery, and, bestowing upon me a slight bow of

farewell, went out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

THE CROSSBAR

How long I lay there alone I had no means of computing. My mind was

busy with many matters, but principally concerned with my fate in the

immediate future. That Dr. Fu-Manchu entertained for me a singular

kind of regard, I had had evidence before. He had formed the erroneous

opinion that I was an advanced scientist who could be of use to him in

his experiments, and I was aware that he cherished a project of

transporting me to some place in China where his principal laboratory

was situated. Respecting the means which he proposed to employ, I was

unlikely to forget that this man, who had penetrated further along

certain byways of science than seemed humanly possible, undoubtedly

was master of a process for producing artificial catalepsy. It was my

lot, then, to be packed in a chest (to all intents and purposes a dead

man for the time being) and dispatched to the interior of China!

What a fool I had been. To think that I had learnt nothing from my

long and dreadful experience of the methods of Dr. Fu-Manchu; to think

that I had come \_alone\_ in quest of him; that, leaving no trace behind

me, I had deliberately penetrated to his secret abode!

I have said that my wrists were manacled behind me, the manacles being

attached to a chain fastened in the wall. I now contrived, with

extreme difficulty, to reverse the position of my hands; that is to

say, I climbed backward through the loop formed by my fettered arms,

so that instead of the gyves being behind me, they now were in front.

Then I began to examine them, learning, as I had anticipated, that

they fastened with a lock. I sat gazing at the steel bracelets in the

light of the lamp which swung over my head, and it became apparent to

me that I had gained little by my contortion.

A slight noise disturbed these unpleasant reveries. It was nothing

less than the rattling of keys!

For a moment I wondered if I had heard aright, or if the sound

portended the coming of some servant of the Doctor who was locking up

the establishment for the night. The jangling sound was repeated, and

in such a way that I could not suppose it to be accidental. Some one

was deliberately rattling a small bunch of keys in an adjoining room.

And now my heart leapt wildly--then seemed to stand still.

With a low whistling cry a little grey shape shot through the doorway

by which Fu-Manchu had retired, and rolled like a ball of fluff blown

by the wind, completely under the table which bore the weird

scientific appliances of the Chinaman; the advent of the grey object

was accompanied by a further rattling of keys.

My fear left me, and a mighty anxiety took its place. This creature

which now crouched chattering at me from beneath the big table was

Fu-Manchu's marmoset, and in the intervals of its chatterings and

grimacing, it nibbled, speculatively, at the keys upon the ring which

it clutched in its tiny hands. Key after key it sampled in this

manner, evincing a growing dissatisfaction with the uncrackable nature

of its find.

One of those keys might be that of the handcuffs!

I could not believe that the tortures of Tantalus were greater than

were mine at this moment. In all my hopes of rescue or release, I had

included nothing so strange, so improbable as this. A sort of awe

possessed me; for if by this means the key which should release me

should come into my possession, how ever again could I doubt a

beneficent Providence?

But they were not yet in my possession; moreover, the key of the

handcuffs might not be amongst the bunch.

Were there no means whereby I could induce the marmoset to approach

me?

Whilst I racked my brains for some scheme, the little animal took the

matter out of my hands. Tossing the ring with its jangling contents a

yard or so across the carpet in my direction, it leapt in pursuit,

picked up the ring, whirled it over its head, and then threw a

complete somersault around it. Now it snatched up the keys again, and

holding them close to its ear, rattled them furiously. Finally, with

an incredible spring, it leapt on to the chain supporting the lamp

above my head, and with the garish shade swinging and spinning wildly,

clung there looking down at me like an acrobat on a trapeze. The tiny,

bluish face, completely framed in grotesque whiskers, enhanced the

illusion of an acrobatic comedian. Never for a moment did it release

its hold upon the key-ring.

My suspense now was almost intolerable. I feared to move, lest,

alarming the marmoset, it should run off again, taking the keys with

it. So as I lay there, looking up at the little creature swinging

above me, the second wonder of the night came to pass.

A voice that I could never forget, strive how I would, a voice that

haunted my dreams by night, and for which by day I was ever listening,

cried out from some adjoining room:

"\_Ta'ala hina!\_" it called. "\_Ta'ala hina, Peko!\_"

It was Kâramanèh!

The effect upon the marmoset was instantaneous. Down came the bunch of

keys upon one side of the shade, almost falling on my head, and down

leapt the ape upon the other. In two leaps it had traversed the room

and had vanished through the curtained doorway.

If ever I had need of coolness it was now; the slightest mistake would

be fatal! The keys had slipped from the mattress of the divan, and now

lay just beyond reach of my fingers. Rapidly I changed my position,

and sought, without undue noise, to move the keys with my foot.

I had actually succeeded in sliding them back on to the mattress,

when, unheralded by any audible footstep, Kâramanèh came through the

doorway, holding the marmoset in her arms. She wore a dress of fragile

muslin material, and out from its folds protruded one silk-stockinged

foot, resting in a high-heeled red shoe....

For a moment she stood watching me, with a sort of enforced composure;

then her glance strayed to the keys lying upon the floor. Slowly, and

with her eyes fixed again upon my face, she crossed the room, stooped,

and took up the key-ring.

It was one of the poignant moments of my life; for by that simple act

all my hopes had been shattered!

Any poor lingering doubt that I may have had left me now. Had the

slightest spark of friendship animated the bosom of Kâramanèh, most

certainly she would have overlooked the presence of the keys--of the

keys which represented my one hope of escape from the clutches of the

fiendish Chinaman.

There is a silence more eloquent than words. For half a minute or

more, Kâramanèh stood watching me--forcing herself to watch me--and I

looked up at her with a concentrated gaze in which rage and reproach

must have been strangely mingled.

What eyes she had!--of that blackly lustrous sort nearly always

associated with unusually dark complexions; but Kâramanèh's complexion

was peachlike, or rather of an exquisite and delicate fairness which

reminded me of the petal of a rose. By some I have been accused of

romancing about this girl's beauty, but only by those who had not met

her; for indeed she was astonishingly lovely.

At last her eyes fell, the long lashes drooped upon her cheeks. She

turned and walked slowly to the chair wherein Fu-Manchu had sat.

Placing the keys upon the table amid the scientific litter, she rested

one dimpled elbow upon the yellow page of the book, and with her chin

in her palm, again directed upon me that enigmatical gaze.

I dared not think of the past, of the past in which this beautiful,

treacherous girl had played a part; yet, watching her, I could not

believe, even now, that she was false! My state was truly a pitiable

one; I could have cried out in sheer anguish. With her long lashes

partly lowered, she watched me awhile, then spoke; and her voice was

music which seemed to mock me; every inflection of that elusive accent

reopened, lancet-like, the ancient wound.

"Why do you look at me so?" she said, almost in a whisper. "By what

right do you reproach me?--Have you ever offered me friendship, that I

should repay you with friendship? When first you came to the house

where I was, by the river--came to save some one from" (there was the

familiar hesitation which always preceded the name of Fu-Manchu)

"from--\_him\_, you treated me as your enemy, although--I would have

been your friend...."

There was appeal in the soft voice, but I laughed mockingly, and threw

myself back upon the divan. Kâramanèh stretched out her hands toward

me, and I shall never forget the expression which flashed into those

glorious eyes; but, seeing me intolerant of her appeal, she drew back

and quickly turned her head aside. Even in this hour of extremity, of

impotent wrath, I could find no contempt in my heart for her feeble

hypocrisy; with all the old wonder I watched that exquisite profile,

and Kâramanèh's very deceitfulness was a salve--for had she not cared

she would not have attempted it!

Suddenly she stood up, taking the keys in her hands, and approached

me.

"Not by word, nor by look," she said quietly, "have you asked for my

friendship, but because I cannot bear you to think of me as you do, I

will prove that I am not the hypocrite and the liar you think me. You

will not trust me, but I will trust you."

I looked up into her eyes, and knew a pagan joy when they faltered

before my searching gaze. She threw herself upon her knees beside me,

and the faint exquisite perfume inseparable from my memories of her,

became perceptible, and seemed as of old to Intoxicate me. The lock

clicked ... and I was free.

Kâramanèh rose swiftly to her feet as I stood up and outstretched my

cramped arms. For one delirious moment her bewitching face was close

to mine, and the dictates of madness almost ruled; but I clenched my

teeth and turned sharply aside. I could not trust myself to speak.

With Fu-Manchu's marmoset again gambolling before us, we walked

through the curtained doorway into the room beyond. It was in

darkness, but I could see the slave-girl in front of me, a slim

silhouette, as she walked to a screened window, and, opening the

screen in the manner of a folding door, also threw up the window.

"Look!" she whispered.

I crept forward and stood beside her. I found myself looking down into

the Museum Street from a first-floor window! Belated traffic still

passed along New Oxford Street on the left, but not a solitary figure

was visible to the right, as far as I could see, and that was nearly

to the railings of the Museum. Immediately opposite, in one of the

flats which I had noticed earlier in the evening, another window was

opened. I turned, and in the reflected light saw that Kâramanèh held a

cord in her hand. Our glances met in the semi-darkness.

She began to haul the cord into the window, and, looking upward, I

perceived that it was looped in some way over the telegraph cables

which crossed the street at that point. It was a slender cord, and it

appeared to be passed across a joint in the cables almost immediately

above the centre of the roadway. As it was hauled in, a second and

stronger line attached to it was pulled, in turn, over the cables, and

thence in by the window. Kâramanèh twisted a length of it around a

metal bracket fastened in the wall, and placed a light wooden crossbar

in my hand.

"Make sure that there is no one in the street," she said, craning out

and looking to right and left, "then \_swing across\_. The length of the

rope is just sufficient to enable you to swing through the open window

opposite, and there is a mattress inside to drop upon. But release the

bar immediately, or you may be dragged back. The door of the room in

which you will find yourself is unlocked, and you have only to walk

down the stairs and out into the street."

I peered at the crossbar in my hand, then looked hard at the girl

beside me. I missed something of the old fire of her nature; she was

very subdued, to-night.

"Thank you, Kâramanèh," I said softly.

She suppressed a little cry as I spoke her name, and drew back into

the shadows.

"I believe you are my friend," I said, "but I cannot understand. Won't

you help me to understand?"

I took her unresisting hand, and drew her toward me. My very soul

seemed to thrill at the contact of her lithe body....

She was trembling wildly and seemed to be trying to speak, but

although her lips framed the words no sound followed. Suddenly

comprehension came to me. I looked down into the street, hitherto

deserted ... and into the upturned face of Fu-Manchu!

Wearing a heavy fur-collared coat, and with his yellow, malignant

countenance grotesquely horrible beneath the shadow of a large tweed

motor cap, he stood motionless, looking up at me. That he had seen me,

I could not doubt; but had he seen my companion?

In a choking whisper Kâramanèh answered my unspoken question.

"He has not seen me! I have done much for you; do in return a small

thing for me! Save my life!"

She dragged me back from the window and fled across the room to the

weird laboratory where I had lain captive. Throwing herself upon the

divan, she held out her white wrists and glanced significantly at the

manacles.

"Lock them upon me!" she said rapidly. "Quick! quick!"

Great as was my mental disturbance, I managed to grasp the purpose of

this device. The very extremity of my danger found me cool. I fastened

the manacles, which so recently had confined my own wrists, upon the

slim wrists of Kâramanèh. A faint and muffled disturbance, doubly

ominous because there was nothing to proclaim its nature, reached me

from some place below, on the ground floor.

"Tie something around my mouth!" directed Kâramanèh with nervous

rapidity. As I began to look about me: "Tear a strip from my dress,"

she said; "do not hesitate--be quick! be quick!"

I seized the flimsy muslin and tore off half a yard or so from the hem

of the skirt. The voice of Dr. Fu-Manchu became audible. He was

speaking rapidly, sibilantly, and evidently was approaching--would be

upon me in a matter of moments. I fastened the strip of fabric over

the girl's mouth and tied it behind, experiencing a pang half

pleasurable and half fearful as I found my hands in contact with the

foamy luxuriance of her hair.

Dr. Fu-Manchu was entering the room immediately beyond.

Snatching up the bunch of keys, I turned and ran, for in another

instant my retreat would be cut off. As I burst once more into the

darkened room I became aware that a door on the farther side of it was

open; and framed in the opening was the tall high-shouldered figure of

the Chinaman, still enveloped in his fur coat and wearing the

grotesque cap. As I saw him, so he perceived me; and as I sprang to

the window, he advanced.

I turned desperately and hurled the bunch of keys with all my force

into the dimly seen face....

Either because they possessed a chatoyant quality of their own (as I

had often suspected), or by reason of the light reflected through the

open window, the green eyes gleamed upon me vividly like those of a

giant cat. One short guttural exclamation paid tribute to the accuracy

of my aim; then I had the crossbar in my hand.

I threw one leg across the sill, and dire as was my extremity,

hesitated for an instant ere trusting myself to the flight....

A vice-like grip fastened upon my left ankle.

Hazily I became aware that the dark room was become flooded with

figures. The whole yellow gang were upon me--the entire murder-group

composed of units recruited from the darkest places of the East!

I have never counted myself a man of resource, and have always envied

Nayland Smith his possession of that quality, in him extraordinarily

developed; but on this occasion the gods were kind to me, and I

resorted to the only device, perhaps, which could have saved me.

Without releasing my hold upon the crossbar, I clutched at the ledge

with the fingers of both hands and swung back, into the room, my

right leg, which was already across the sill. With all my strength I

kicked out. My heel came in contact, in sickening contact, with a

human head; beyond doubt I had split the skull of the man who held me.

The grip upon my ankle was released automatically; and now consigning

all my weight to the rope, I slipped forward, as a diver, across the

broad ledge and found myself sweeping through the night like a winged

thing....

The line, as Kâramanèh had assured me, was of well-judged length. Down

I swept to within six or seven feet of the street level, then up, up,

at ever-decreasing speed, toward the vague oblong of the open window

beyond.

I hope I have been successful, in some measure, in portraying the

varied emotions which it was my lot to experience that night, and it

may well seem that nothing more exquisite could remain for me. Yet it

was written otherwise; for as I swept up to my goal, describing the

inevitable arc which I had no power to check, I saw that \_one\_ awaited

me.

Crouching forward half out of the open window was a Burmese dacoit, a

cross-eyed, leering being whom I well remembered to have encountered

two years before in my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu. One bare, sinewy

arm held rigidly at right angles before his breast, he clutched a long

curved knife and waited--waited--for the critical moment when my

throat should be at his mercy!

I have said that a strange coolness had come to my aid; even now it

did not fail me, and so incalculably rapid are the workings of the

human mind that I remembered complimenting myself upon an achievement

which Smith himself could not have bettered, and this in the

immeasurable interval which intervened between the commencement of my

upward swing and my arrival on a level with the window.

I threw my body back and thrust my feet forward. As my legs went

through the opening, an acute pain in one calf told me that I was not

to escape scathless from the night's mêlée. But the dacoit went

rolling over in the darkness of the room, as helpless in face of that

ramrod stroke as the veriest infant....

Back I swept upon my trapeze, a sight to have induced any passing

citizen to question his sanity. With might and main I sought to check

the swing of the pendulum, for if I should come within reach of the

window behind I doubted not that other knives awaited me. It was no

difficult feat, and I succeeded in checking my flight. Swinging there

above Museum Street I could even appreciate, so lucid was my mind, the

ludicrous element of the situation.

I dropped. My wounded leg almost failed me; and greatly shaken, but

with no other serious damage, I picked myself up from the dust of the

roadway--to see the bar vanishing into the darkness above. It was a

mockery of Fate that the problem which Nayland Smith had set me to

solve should have been solved thus: for I could not doubt that by

means of the branch of a tall tree or some other suitable object

situated opposite to Smith's house in Rangoon, Kâramanèh had made her

escape as to-night I had made mine.

Apart from the acute pain in my calf I knew that the dacoit's knife

had bitten deeply by reason of the fact that a warm liquid was

trickling down into my boot. Like any drunkard I stood there in the

middle of the road looking up at the vacant window where the dacoit

had been, and up at the window above the shop of J. Salaman where I

knew Fu-Manchu to be. But for some reason the latter window had been

closed or almost closed, and as I stood there this reason became

apparent to me.

The sound of running footsteps came from the direction of New Oxford

Street. I turned--to see two policemen bearing down upon me!

This was a time for quick decisions and prompt action. I weighed all

the circumstances in the balance, and made the last vital choice of

the night; I turned and ran toward the British Museum as though the

worst of Fu-Manchu's creatures, and not my allies the police, were at

my heels!

No one else was in sight, but, as I whirled into the Square, the red

lamp of a slowly retreating taxi became visible some hundred yards to

the left. My leg was paining me greatly, but the nature of the wound

did not interfere with my progress; therefore I continued my headlong

career, and ere the police had reached the end of Museum Street I had

my hand upon the door handle of the cab--for, the Fates being

persistently kind to me, the vehicle was for hire.

"Dr. Cleeve's, Harley Street!" I shouted at the man. "Drive like hell!

It's an urgent case."

I leapt into the cab.

Within five seconds from the time that I slammed the door and dropped

back panting upon the cushions, we were speeding westward toward the

house of the famous pathologist, thereby throwing the police

hopelessly off the track.

Faintly to my ears came the purr of a police whistle. The taxi-man

evidently did not hear the significant sound. Merciful Providence had

rung down the curtain; for to-night my rôle in the yellow drama was

finished.

CHAPTER XXI

CRAGMIRE TOWER

Less than two hours later, Inspector Weymouth and a party from New

Scotland Yard raided the house in Museum Street. They found the stock

of J. Salaman practically intact, and, in the strangely appointed

rooms above, every evidence of a hasty outgoing. But of the

instruments, drugs and other laboratory paraphernalia not one item

remained. I would gladly have given my income for a year, to have

gained possession of the books, alone; for beyond all shadow of doubt,

I knew them to contain formulæ calculated to revolutionize the science

of medicine.

Exhausted, physically and mentally, and with my mind a

whispering-gallery of conjectures (it were needless for me to mention

\_whom\_ respecting), I turned in, gratefully, having patched up the

slight wound in my calf.

I seemed scarcely to have closed my eyes, when Nayland Smith was

shaking me into wakefulness.

"You are probably tired out," he said; "but your crazy expedition of

last night entitles you to no sympathy. Read this. There is a train in

an hour. We will reserve a compartment and you can resume your

interrupted slumbers in a corner seat."

As I struggled upright in bed, rubbing my eyes sleepily, Smith handed

me the \_Daily Telegraph\_, pointing to the following paragraph upon the

literary page:

"Messrs. M---- announce that they will publish shortly the

long-delayed work of Kegan Van Roon, the celebrated American

traveller, Orientalist and psychic investigator, dealing with his

recent inquiries in China. It will be remembered that Mr. Van Roon

undertook to motor from Canton to Siberia last winter, but met with

unforeseen difficulties in the province of Ho-Nan. He fell into the

hands of a body of fanatics and was fortunate to escape with his life.

His book will deal in particular with his experiences in Ho-Nan, and

some sensational revelations regarding the awakening of that most

mysterious race, the Chinese, are promised. For reasons of his own he

has decided to remain in England until the completion of his book

(which will be published simultaneously in New York and London), and

has leased Cragmire Tower, Somersetshire, in which romantic and

historical residence he will collate his notes and prepare for the

world a work ear-marked as a classic even before it is published."

I glanced up from the paper, to find Smith's eyes fixed upon me

inquiringly.

"From what I have been able to learn," he said evenly, "we should

reach Saul, with decent luck, just before dusk."

As he turned and quitted the room without another word, I realized, in

a flash, the purport of our mission; I understood my friend's ominous

calm, betokening suppressed excitement.

Fortune was with us (or so it seemed); and whereas we had not hoped to

gain Saul before sunset, as a matter of fact the autumn afternoon was

in its most glorious phase as we left the little village with its

old-time hostelry behind us and set out in an easterly direction, with

the Bristol Channel far away on our left and a gently sloping upland

on our right.

The crooked high-street practically constituted the entire hamlet of

Saul, and the inn, The Wagoners, was the last house in the street.

Now, as we followed the ribbon of moor-path to the top of the rise, we

could stand and look back upon the way we had come; and although we

had covered fully a mile of ground, it was possible to detect the

sunlight gleaming now and then upon the gilt lettering of the inn

sign as it swayed in the breeze. The day had been unpleasantly warm,

but relieved by this same sea breeze, which, although but slight, had

in it the tang of the broad Atlantic. Behind us, then, the footpath

sloped down to Saul, unpeopled by any living thing; east and

north-east swelled the monotony of the moor right out to the hazy

distance where the sky began and the sea remotely lay hidden; west

fell the gentle gradient from the top of the slope which we had

mounted, and here, as far as the eye could reach, the country had an

appearance suggestive of a huge and dried-up lake. This idea was borne

out by an odd blotchiness, for sometimes there would be half a mile or

more of seeming moorland, then a sharply defined change (or it seemed

sharply defined from that bird's-eye point of view). A vivid greenness

marked these changes, which merged into a dun coloured smudge and

again into the brilliant green; then the moor would begin once more.

"That will be the Tor of Glastonbury, I suppose," said Smith, suddenly

peering through his field-glasses in an easterly direction; "and

yonder, unless I am greatly mistaken, is Cragmire Tower."

Shading my eyes with my hand, I also looked ahead, and saw the place

for which we were bound; one of those round towers, more common in

Ireland, which some authorities have declared to be of Phoenician

origin. Ramshackle buildings clustered untidily about its base, and to

it a sort of tongue of that oddly venomous green which patched the

lowlands shot out and seemed almost to reach the tower-base. The land

for miles around was as flat as the palm of my hand, saving certain

hummocks, lesser tors, and irregular piles of boulders which dotted

its expanse. Hills and uplands there were in the hazy distance,

forming a sort of mighty inland bay which I doubted not in some past

age had been covered by the sea. Even in the brilliant sunlight the

place had something of a mournful aspect, looking like a great

dried-up pool into which the children of giants had carelessly cast

stones.

We met no living soul upon the moor. With Cragmire Tower but a quarter

of a mile off, Smith paused again, and raising his powerful glasses

swept the visible landscape.

"Not a sign, Petrie," he said softly; "yet...."

Dropping the glasses back into their case, my companion began to tug

at his left ear.

"Have we been over-confident?" he said, narrowing his eyes in

speculative fashion. "No less than three times I have had the idea

that something, or some one, has just dropped out of sight, \_behind\_

us, as I focussed...."

"What do you mean, Smith?"

"Are we"--he glanced about him as though the vastness were peopled

with listening Chinamen--"\_followed\_?"

Silently we looked into one another's eyes, each seeking for the dread

which neither had named. Then:

"Come on, Petrie!" said Smith, grasping my arm: and at quick march we

were off again.

Cragmire Tower stood upon a very slight eminence, and what had looked

like a green tongue, from the moorland slopes above, was in fact a

creek, flanked by lush land, which here found its way to the sea. The

house which we were come to visit consisted in a low, two-storey

building, joining the ancient tower on the east, with two smaller

out-buildings. There was a miniature kitchen-garden, and a few stunted

fruit trees in the north-west corner; the whole being surrounded by a

grey stone wall.

The shadow of the tower fell sharply across the path, which ran up

almost alongside of it. We were both extremely warm by reason of our

long and rapid walk on that hot day, and this shade should have been

grateful to us. In short, I find it difficult to account for the

unwelcome chill which I experienced at the moment that I found myself

at the foot of the time-worn monument. I know that we both pulled up

sharply and looked at one another as though acted upon by some mutual

disturbance.

But not a sound broke the stillness save the remote murmuring, until a

solitary sea-gull rose in the air and circled directly over the tower,

uttering its mournful and unmusical cry. Automatically to my mind

sprang the lines of the poem:

Far from all brother-men, in the weird of the fen,

With God's creatures I bide, 'mid the birds that I ken;

Where the winds ever dree, where the hymn of the sea

Brings a message of peace from the ocean to me.

Not a soul was visible about the premises; there was no sound of human

activity and no dog barked. Nayland Smith drew a long breath, glanced

back along the way we had come, then went on, following the wall, I

beside him, until we came to the gate. It was unfastened, and we

walked up the stone path through a wilderness of weeds. Four windows

of the house were visible, two on the ground floor and two above.

Those on the ground floor were heavily boarded up, those above, though

glazed, boasted neither blinds nor curtains. Cragmire Tower showed not

the slightest evidence of tenancy.

We mounted three steps and stood before a tremendously massive oaken

door. An iron bell-pull, ancient and rusty, hung on the right of the

door, and Smith, giving me an odd glance, seized the ring and tugged

it.

From somewhere within the building answered a mournful clangour, a

cracked and toneless jangle, which, seeming to echo through empty

apartments, sought and found an exit apparently by way of one of the

openings in the round tower; for it was from above our heads that the

noise came to us.

It died away, that eerie ringing--that clanging so dismal that it

could chill my heart even then with the bright sunlight streaming

down out of the blue; it awoke no other response than the mournful cry

of the sea-gull circling over our heads. Silence fell. We looked at

one another, and we were both about to express a mutual doubt, when,

unheralded by any unfastening of bolts or bars, the door was opened,

and a huge mulatto, dressed in white, stood there regarding us.

I started nervously, for the apparition was so unexpected, but Nayland

Smith, without evidence of surprise, thrust a card into the man's

hand.

"Take my card to Mr. Van Roon, and say that I wish to see him on

important business," he directed authoritatively.

The mulatto bowed and retired. His white figure seemed to be swallowed

up by the darkness within, for beyond the patch of uncarpeted floor

revealed by the peeping sunlight, was a barn-like place of densest

shadow. I was about to speak, but Smith laid his hand upon my arm

warningly, as, out from the shadows, the mulatto returned. He stood on

the right of the door and bowed again.

"Be pleased to enter," he said, in his harsh, negro voice. "Mr. Van

Roon will see you."

The gladness of the sun could no longer stir me; a chill and sense of

foreboding bore me company as beside Nayland Smith I entered Cragmire

Tower.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MULATTO

The room in which Van Roon received us was roughly of the shape of an

old-fashioned key-hole; one end if it occupied the base of the tower,

upon which the remainder had evidently been built. In many respects it

was a singular room, but the feature which caused me the greatest

amazement was this--it had no windows!

In the deep alcove formed by the tower sat Van Roon at a littered

table, upon which stood an oil reading-lamp, green-shaded, of the

"Victoria" pattern, to furnish the entire illumination of the

apartment. That book-shelves lined the rectangular portion of this

strange study I divined, although that end of the place was dark as a

catacomb. The walls were wood-panelled, and the ceiling was

oaken-beamed. A small book shelf and tumble-down cabinet stood upon

either side of the table, and the celebrated American author and

traveller lay propped up in a long split-cane chair. He wore smoke

glasses, and had a clean-shaven, olive face, with a profusion of

jet-black hair. He was garbed in a dirty red dressing-gown, and a

perfect fog of cigar smoke hung in the room. He did not rise to greet

us, but merely extended his right hand, between two fingers whereof he

held Smith's card.

"You will excuse the seeming discourtesy of an invalid, gentlemen?" he

said; "but I am suffering from undue temerity in the interior of

China!"

He waved his hand vaguely, and I saw that two rough deal chairs stood

near the table. Smith and I seated ourselves, and my friend, leaning

his elbow upon the table, looked fixedly at the face of the man whom

we were come from London to visit. Although comparatively unfamiliar

to the British public, the name of Van Roon was well known in American

literary circles; for he enjoyed in the United States a reputation

somewhat similar to that which had rendered the name of our mutual

friend, Sir Lionel Barton, a household word in England. It was Van

Roon who, following in the footsteps of Madame Blavatsky, had sought

out the haunts of the fabled mahatmas in the Himalayas, and Van Roon

who had essayed to explore the fever swamps of Yucatan in quest of the

secret of lost Atlantis; lastly, it was Van Roon, who, with an

overland car specially built for him by a celebrated American firm,

had undertaken the journey across China.

I studied the olive face with curiosity. Its natural impassivity was

so greatly increased by the presence of the coloured spectacles that

my study was as profitless as if I had scrutinized the face of a

carven Buddha. The mulatto had withdrawn, and in an atmosphere of

gloom and tobacco smoke Smith and I sat staring, perhaps rather

rudely, at the object of our visit to the West Country.

"Mr. Van Roon," began my friend abruptly, "you will no doubt have seen

this paragraph. It appeared in this morning's \_Daily Telegraph\_."

He stood up, and taking out the cutting from his notebook, placed it

on the table.

"I have seen this--yes," said Van Roon, revealing a row of even white

teeth in a rapid smile. "Is it to this paragraph that I owe the

pleasure of seeing you here?"

"The paragraph appeared in this morning's issue," replied Smith. "An

hour from the time of seeing it, my friend, Dr. Petrie, and I were

entrained for Bridgwater."

"Your visit delights me, gentlemen, and I should be ungrateful to

question its cause; but frankly I am at a loss to understand why you

should have honoured me thus. I am a poor host, God knows; for what

with my tortured limb, a legacy from the Chinese devils whose secrets

I surprised, and my semi-blindness, due to the same cause, I am but

sorry company."

Nayland Smith held up his right hand deprecatingly. Van Roon tendered

a box of cigars and clapped his hands, whereupon the mulatto entered.

"I see that you have a story to tell me, Mr. Smith," he said;

"therefore I suggest whisky-and-soda--or you might prefer tea, as it

is nearly tea-time?"

Smith and I chose the former refreshment, and the soft-footed

half-breed having departed upon his errand, my companion, leaning

forward earnestly across the littered table, outlined for Van Roon the

story of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the great and malign being whose mission in

England at that moment was none other than the stoppage of just such

information as our host was preparing to give to the world.

"There is a giant conspiracy, Mr. Van Roon," he said, "which had its

birth in this very province of Ho-Nan, from which you were so

fortunate to escape alive; whatever its scope or limitations, a great

secret society is established among the yellow races. It means that

China, which has slumbered for so many generations, now stirs in that

age-long sleep. I need not tell \_you\_ how much more it means, this

seething in the pot...."

"In a word," interrupted Van Roon, pushing Smith's glass across the

table, "you would say--"

"That your life is not worth that!" replied Smith, snapping his

fingers before the other's face.

A very impressive silence fell. I watched Van Roon curiously as he sat

propped up among his cushions, his smooth face ghastly in the green

light from the lamp-shade. He held the stump of a cigar between his

teeth, but, apparently unnoticed by him, it had long since gone out.

Smith, out of the shadows, was watching him, too. Then--

"Your information is very disturbing," said the American. "I am the

more disposed to credit your statement because I am all too painfully

aware of the existence of such a group as you mention, in China, but

that they had an agent here in England is something I had never

conjectured. In seeking out this solitary residence I have unwittingly

done much to assist their designs.... But--my dear Mr. Smith, I am

very remiss! Of course you will remain to-night, and I trust for some

days to come?"

Smith glanced rapidly across at me, then turned again to our host.

"It seems like forcing our company upon you," he said, "but in your

own interests I think it will be best to do as you are good enough to

suggest. I hope and believe that our arrival here has not been noticed

by the enemy; therefore it will be well if we remain concealed as much

as possible for the present, until we have settled upon some plan."

"Hagar shall go to the station for your baggage," said the American

rapidly, and clapped his hands, his usual signal to the mulatto.

Whilst the latter was receiving his orders I noticed Nayland Smith

watching him closely; and when he had departed:

"How long has that man been in your service?" snapped my friend.

Van Roon peered blindly through his smoked glasses.

"For some years," he replied; "he was with me in India--and in China."

"Where did you engage him?"

"Actually, in St. Kitts."

"H'm," muttered Smith, and automatically he took out and began to fill

his pipe.

"I can offer you no company but my own, gentlemen," continued Van

Roon, "but unless it interfere, with your plans, you may find the

surrounding district of interest and worthy of inspection, between now

and dinner-time. By the way, I think I can promise you quite a

satisfactory meal, for Hagar is a model chef."

"A walk would be enjoyable," said Smith, "but dangerous."

"Ah! perhaps you are right. Evidently you apprehend some attempt upon

me?"

"At any moment!"

"To one in my crippled condition, an alarming outlook! However, I

place myself unreservedly in your hands. But really, you must not

leave this interesting district before you have made the acquaintance

of some of its historical spots. To me, steeped as I am in what I may

term the lore of the odd, it is a veritable wonderland, almost as

interesting, in its way, as the caves and jungles of Hindustan

depicted by Madame Blavatsky."

His high-pitched voice, with a certain laboured intonation, not quite

so characteristically American as was his accent, rose even higher; he

spoke with the fire of the enthusiast.

"When I learnt that Cragmire Tower was vacant," he continued, "I leapt

at the chance (excuse the metaphor, from a lame man!). This is a

ghost-hunter's paradise. The tower itself is of unknown origin, though

probably Phoenician, and the house traditionally sheltered Dr.

Macleod, the necromancer, after his flight from the persecution of

James of Scotland. Then, to add to its interest, it borders on

Sedgemoor, the scene of the bloody battle during the Monmouth rising,

whereat a thousand were slain on the field. It is a local legend that

the unhappy Duke and his staff may be seen, on stormy nights, crossing

the path which skirts the mire, after which this building is named,

with flaming torches held aloft."

"Merely marsh-lights, I take it?" interjected Smith, gripping his pipe

hard between his teeth.

"Your practical mind naturally seeks a practical explanation," smiled

Van Roon, "but I myself have other theories. Then in addition to the

charms of Sedgemoor--haunted Sedgemoor--on a fine day it is quite

possible to see the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey from here; and

Glastonbury Abbey, as you may know, is closely bound up with the

history of Alchemy. It was in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey that the

adept Kelly, companion of Dr. Dee, discovered, in the reign of

Elizabeth, the famous caskets of St. Dunstan, containing the two

tinctures...."

So he ran on, enumerating the odd charms of his residence, charms

which for my part I did not find appealing. Finally--

"We cannot presume further upon your kindness," said Nayland Smith,

standing up. "No doubt we can amuse ourselves in the neighbourhood of

the house until the return of your servant."

"Look upon Cragmire Tower as your own, gentlemen!" cried Van Roon.

"Most of the rooms are unfurnished, and the garden is a wilderness,

but the structure of the brickwork in the tower may interest you

archæologically, and the view across the moor is at least as fine as

any in the neighbourhood."

So, with his brilliant smile and a gesture of one thin yellow hand,

the crippled traveller made us free of his odd dwelling. As I passed

out from the room close at Smith's heels, I glanced back, I cannot say

why. Van Roon already was bending over his papers, in his

green-shadowed sanctuary, and the light shining down upon his smoked

glasses created the odd illusion that he was looking over the tops of

the lenses and not down at the table as his attitude suggested.

However, it was probably ascribable to the weird chiaroscuro of the

scene, although it gave the seated figure an oddly malignant

appearance, and I passed through the utter darkness of the outer room

to the front door. Smith opening it, I was conscious of surprise to

find dusk come--to meet darkness where I had looked for sunlight.

The silver wisps which had raced along the horizon, as we came to

Cragmire Tower, had been harbingers of other and heavier banks. A

stormy sunset smeared crimson streaks across the skyline, where a

great range of clouds, like the oily smoke of a city burning, was

banked, mountain topping mountain, and lighted from below by this

angry red. As we came down the steps and out by the gate, I turned and

looked across the moor behind us. A sort of reflection from this

distant blaze encrimsoned the whole landscape. The inland bay glowed

sullenly, as if internal fires and not reflected light were at work;

a scene both wild and majestic.

Nayland Smith was staring up at the cone-like top of the ancient tower

in a curious, speculative fashion. Under the influence of our host's

conversation I had forgotten the reasonless dread which had touched me

at the moment of our arrival, but now, with the red light blazing over

Sedgemoor, as if in memory of the blood which had been shed there, and

with the tower of unknown origin looming above me, I became very

uncomfortable again, nor did I envy Van Roon his eerie residence. The

proximity of a tower of any kind, at night, makes in some inexplicable

way for awe, and to-night there were other agents, too.

"What's that?" snapped Smith suddenly, grasping my arm.

He was peering southward, toward the distant hamlet, and, starting

violently at his words and the sudden grasp of his hand, I, too,

stared in that direction.

"We were followed, Petrie," he almost whispered. "I never got a sight

of our follower, but I'll swear we were followed. Look! there's

something moving over yonder!"

Together we stood staring into the dusk; then Smith burst abruptly

into one of his rare laughs, and clapped me upon the shoulder.

"It's Hagar, the mulatto!" he cried, "and our grips. That

extraordinary American with his tales of witch-lights and haunted

abbeys has been playing the devil with our nerves." He glanced up at

the tower. "What a place to live in! Frankly, I don't think I could

stand it."

Together we waited by the gate until the half-caste appeared on the

bend of the path with a grip in either hand. He was a great, muscular

fellow with a stoic face, and, for the purpose of visiting Saul,

presumably, he had doffed his white raiment and now wore a sort of

livery, with a peaked cap.

Smith watched him enter the house. Then--

"I wonder where Van Roon obtains his provisions and so forth," he

muttered. "It's odd they knew nothing about the new tenant of Cragmire

Tower at 'The Wagoners.'"

There came a sort of sudden expectancy into his manner for which I

found myself at a loss to account. He turned his gaze inland and stood

there tugging at his left ear and clicking his teeth together. He

stared at me, and his eyes looked very bright in the dusk, for a sort

of red glow from the sunset touched them; but he spoke no word, merely

taking my arm and leading me off on a rambling walk around and about

the house. Neither of us spoke a word until we stood at the gate of

Cragmire Tower again; then--

"I'll swear, now, that we were followed here to-day!" muttered Smith.

The lofty place immediately within the doorway proved, in the light of

a lamp now fixed in an iron bracket, to be a square entrance hall

meagrely furnished. The closed study door faced the entrance, and on

the left of it ascended an open staircase up which the mulatto led the

way. We found ourselves on the floor above, in a corridor traversing

the house from back to front. An apartment on the immediate left was

indicated by the mulatto as that allotted to Smith. It was a room of

fair size, furnished quite simply but boasting a wardrobe cupboard,

and Smith's grip stood beside the white-enamelled bed. I glanced

around, and then prepared to follow the man, who had awaited me in the

doorway.

He still wore his dark livery, and as I followed the lithe yet brawny

figure along the corridor, I found myself considering critically his

breadth of shoulder and the extraordinary thickness of his neck.

I have repeatedly spoken of a sort of foreboding, an elusive stirring

in the depths of my being, of which I became conscious at certain

times in my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu and his murderous servants.

This sensation, or something akin to it, claimed me now,

unaccountably, as I stood looking into the neat bedroom, on the same

side of the corridor but at the extreme end, wherein I was to sleep. A

voiceless warning urged me to return; a kind of childish panic came

fluttering about my heart, a dread of entering the room, of allowing

the mulatto to come \_behind me\_.

Doubtless this was no more than a subconscious product of my

observations respecting his abnormal breadth of shoulder. But whatever

the origin of the impulse, I found myself unable to disobey it.

Therefore, I merely nodded, turned on my heel and went back to Smith's

room.

I closed the door, then turned to face Smith, who stood regarding me.

"Smith," I said, "that man sends cold water trickling down my spine!"

Still regarding me fixedly, my friend nodded his head.

"You are curiously sensitive to this sort of thing," he replied

slowly; "I have noticed it before as a useful capacity. I don't like

the look of the man myself. The fact that he has been in Van Roon's

employ for some years goes for nothing. We are neither of us likely to

forget Kwee, the Chinese servant of Sir Lionel Barton, and it is quite

possible that Fu-Manchu has corrupted this man as he corrupted the

other. It is quite possible...."

His voice trailed off into silence, and he stood looking across the

room with unseeing eyes, meditating deeply. It was quite dark, now,

outside, as I could see through the uncurtained window, which opened

upon the dreary expanse stretching out to haunted Sedgemoor. Two

candles were burning upon the dressing-table; they were but recently

lighted, and so intense was the stillness that I could distinctly hear

the spluttering of one of the wicks, which was damp. Without giving

the slightest warning of his intention, Smith suddenly made two

strides forward, stretched out his long arms, and snuffed the pair of

candles in a twinkling!

The room became plunged in impenetrable darkness.

"Not a word, Petrie!" whispered my companion.

I moved cautiously to join him, but as I did so, perceived that he was

moving, too. Vaguely, against the window I perceived him silhouetted.

He was looking out across the moor, and--

"See! see!" he hissed.

My heart thumping furiously in my breast, I bent over him; and for the

second time since our coming to Cragmire Tower, my thoughts flew to

"The Fenman."

There are shades in the fen; ghosts of women and men

Who have sinned and have died, but are living again.

O'er the waters they tread, with their lanterns of dread,

And they peer in the pools--in the pools of the dead....

A light was dancing out upon the moor, a witch-light that came and

went unaccountably, up and down, in and out, now clearly visible, now

masked in the darkness!

"Lock the door!" snapped my companion--"if there's a key."

I crept across the room and fumbled for a moment; then--

"There is no key," I reported.

"Then wedge the chair under the knob and let no one enter until I

return!" he said amazingly.

With that he opened the window to its fullest extent, threw his leg

over the sill, and went creeping along a wide concrete ledge, in which

ran a leaded gutter, in the direction of the tower on the right!

Not pausing to follow his instructions respecting the chair, I craned

out of the window, watching his progress, and wondering with what

sudden madness he was bitten. Indeed, I could not credit my senses,

could not believe that I heard and saw aright. Yet there out in the

darkness on the moor moved the will-o'-the-wisp, and ten yards along

the gutter crept my friend, like a great gaunt cat. Unknown to me he

must have prospected the route by daylight, for now I saw his design.

The ledge terminated only where it met the ancient wall of the tower,

and it was possible for an agile climber to step from it to the edge

of the unglazed window some four feet below, and to scramble from that

point to the stone fence and thence on to the path by which we had

come from Saul.

This difficult operation Nayland Smith successfully performed, and, to

my unbounded amazement, went racing into the darkness toward the

dancing light, headlong, like a madman! The night swallowed him up,

and between my wonder and my fear my hands trembled so violently that

I could scarce support myself where I rested, with my full weight upon

the sill.

I seemed now to be moving through the fevered phases of a nightmare.

Around and below me Cragmire Tower was profoundly silent, but a faint

odour of cookery was now perceptible. Outside, from the night, came a

faint whispering as of the distant sea, but no moon and no stars

relieved the impenetrable blackness. Only out over the moor the

mysterious light still danced and moved.

One--two--three--four--five minutes passed. The light vanished and did

not appear again. Five more age-long minutes elapsed in absolute

silence, whilst I peered into the darkness of the night and listened,

muscles tensed, for the return of Nayland Smith. Yet two more minutes,

which embraced an agony of suspense, passed in the same fashion; then

a shadowy form grew, phantomesque, out of the gloom; a moment more,

and I distinctly heard the heavy breathing of a man nearly spent, and

saw my friend scrambling up toward the black embrasure in the tower.

His voice came huskily, pantingly:

"Creep along and lend me a hand, Petrie! I am nearly winded."

I crept through the window, steadied my quivering nerves by an effort

of the will, and reached the end of the ledge in time to take Smith's

extended hand and to draw him up beside me against the wall of the

tower. He was shaking with his exertions, and must have fallen, I

think, without my assistance. Inside the room again--

"Quick! light the candles!" he breathed hoarsely. "Did any one come?"

"No one--nothing."

Having expended several matches in vain, for my fingers twitched

nervously, I ultimately succeeded in relighting the candles.

"Get along to your room!" directed Smith. "Your apprehensions are

unfounded at the moment, but you may as well leave both doors wide

open!"

I looked into his face--it was very drawn and grim, and his brow was

wet with perspiration, but his eyes had the fighting glint, and I knew

that we were upon the eve of strange happenings.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CRY ON THE MOOR

Of the events intervening between this moment and that when death

called to us out of the night, I have the haziest recollections. An

excellent dinner was served in the bleak and gloomy dining-room by

the mulatto, and the crippled author was carried to the head of the

table by this same herculean attendant, as lightly as though he had

had but the weight of a child.

Van Roon talked continuously, revealing a deep knowledge of all sorts

of obscure matters; and in the brief intervals, Nayland Smith talked

also, with almost feverish rapidity. Plans for the future were

discussed. I can recall no one of them.

I could not stifle my queer sentiments in regard to the mulatto, and

every time I found him behind my chair I was hard put to it to repress

a shudder. In this fashion the strange evening passed; and to the

accompaniment of distant, muttering thunder, we two guests retired to

our chambers in Cragmire Tower. Smith had contrived to give me my

instructions in a whisper, and five minutes after entering my own

room, I had snuffed the candles, slipped a wedge, which he had given

me, under the door, crept out through the window on to the guttered

ledge, and joined Smith in his room. He, too, had extinguished his

candles, and the place was in darkness. As I climbed in, he grasped my

wrist to silence me, and turned me forcibly toward the window again.

"Listen!" he said.

I turned and looked out upon a prospect which had been a fit setting

for the witch scene in \_Macbeth\_. Thunderclouds hung low over the

moor, but through them ran a sort of chasm, or rift, allowing a bar of

lurid light to stretch across the drear, from east to west--a sort of

lane walled by darkness. There came a remote murmuring, as of a

troubled sea--a hushed and distant chorus; and sometimes in upon it

broke the drums of heaven. In the west lightning flickered, though but

faintly, intermittently.

Then came the \_call\_.

Out of the blackness of the moor it came, wild and distant--"\_Help!

help!\_"

"Smith!" I whispered--"what is it? What...."

"Mr. Smith!" came the agonized cry ... "Nayland Smith, help! for God's

sake...."

"Quick, Smith!" I cried, "quick, man! It's Van Roon--he's been dragged

out ... they are murdering him...."

Nayland Smith held me in a vice-like grip, silent, unmoved!

Louder and more agonized came the cry for aid, and I felt more than

ever certain that it was poor Van Roon who uttered it.

"Mr. Smith! Dr. Petrie! for God's sake come ... or ... it will be ...

too ... late...."

"Smith!" I said, turning furiously upon my friend, "if you are going

to remain here whilst murder is done, \_I\_ am not!"

My blood boiled now with hot resentment. It was incredible, inhuman,

that we should remain there inert whilst a fellow-man, and our host to

boot, was being done to death out there in the darkness. I exerted all

my strength to break away; but although my efforts told upon him, as

his loud breathing revealed, Nayland Smith clung to me tenaciously.

Had my hands been free, in my fury I could have struck him; for the

pitiable cries, growing fainter now, told their own tale. Then Smith

spoke--shortly and angrily--breathing hard between the words.

"Be quiet, you fool!" he snapped. "It's little less than an insult,

Petrie, to think me capable of refusing help where help is needed!"

Like, a cold douche his words acted; in that instant I knew myself a

fool.

"You remember the Call of Siva?" he said, thrusting me away

irritably, "--two years ago--and what it meant to those who obeyed it?"

"You might have told me...."

"\_Told\_ you! You would have been through the window before I had

uttered two words!"

I realized the truth of his assertion, and the justness of his anger.

"Forgive me, old man," I said, very crestfallen, "but my impulse was a

natural one, you'll admit. You must remember that I have been trained

never to refuse aid when aid is asked."

"Shut up, Petrie!" he growled; "forget it."

The cries had ceased, now, entirely, and a peal of thunder, louder

than any yet, echoed over distant Sedgemoor. The chasm of light

splitting the heavens closed in, leaving the night wholly black.

"Don't talk!" rapped Smith; "act! You wedged your door?"

"Yes."

"Good. Get into that cupboard, have your Browning ready, and keep the

door very slightly ajar."

He was in that mood of repressed fever which I knew and which always

communicated itself to me. I spoke no further word, but stepped into

the wardrobe indicated and drew the door nearly shut. The recess just

accommodated me, and through the aperture I could see the bed,

vaguely, the open window, and part of the opposite wall. I saw Smith

cross the floor, as a mighty clap of thunder boomed over the house.

A gleam of lightning flickered through the gloom.

I saw the bed for a moment, distinctly, and it appeared to me that

Smith lay therein, with the sheets pulled up over his head. The light

was gone and I could hear big drops of rain pattering upon the leaden

gutter below the open window.

My mood was strange, detached, and characterized by vagueness. That

Van Roon lay dead upon the moor I was convinced; and--although I

recognized that it must be a sufficient one--I could not even dimly

divine the reason why we had refrained from lending him aid. To have

failed to save him, knowing his peril, would have been bad enough; to

have \_refused\_, I thought, was shameful. Better to have shared his

fate--yet....

The downpour was increasing, and beating now a regular tattoo upon the

gutter-way. Then, splitting the oblong of greater blackness which

marked the casement, quivered dazzlingly another flash of lightning in

which I saw the bed again, with that impression of Smith curled up in

it. The blinding light died out; came the crash of thunder, harsh and

fearsome, more imminently above the tower than ever. The building

seemed to shake.

Coming as they did, horror and the wrath of heaven together, suddenly,

crashingly, black and angry after the fairness of the day, these

happenings and their setting must have terrorized the stoutest heart;

but somehow I seemed detached, as I have said, and set apart from the

whirl of events; a spectator. Even when a vague yellow light crept

across the room from the direction of the door, and flickered

unsteadily on the bed, I remained unmoved to a certain degree,

although passively alive to the significance of the incident. I

realised that the ultimate issue was at hand, but either because I was

emotionally exhausted, or from some other cause, the pending climax

failed to disturb me.

Going on tiptoe, in stockinged feet, across my field of vision, passed

Kegan Van Roon! He was in his shirt-sleeves and held a lighted candle

in one hand whilst with the other he shaded it against the draught

from the window. He was a cripple no longer, and the smoked glasses

were discarded; most of the light, at the moment when first I saw him,

shone upon his thin, olive face, and at sight of his eyes much of the

mystery of Cragmire Tower was resolved. For they were oblique, very

slightly, but nevertheless unmistakably oblique. Though highly

educated, and possibly an American citizen, \_Van Roon was a Chinaman!\_

Upon the picture of his face as I saw it then, I do not care to

dwell. It lacked the unique horror of Dr. Fu-Manchu's unforgettable

countenance, but possessed a sort of animal malignancy which the

latter lacked.... He approached within three or four feet of the bed,

peering--peering. Then, with a timidity which spoke well for Nayland

Smith's reputation, he paused and beckoned to some one who evidently

stood in the doorway behind him. As he did so I saw that the legs of

his trousers were caked with greenish-brown mud nearly up to the

knees.

The huge mulatto, silent-footed, crossed to the bed in three strides.

He was stripped to the waist, and excepting some few professional

athletes, I had never seen a torso to compare with that which, brown

and glistening, now bent over Nayland Smith. The muscular development

was simply enormous; the man had a neck like a column, and the thews

around his back and shoulders were like ivy tentacles wreathing some

gnarled oak.

Whilst Van Roon, his evil gaze upon the bed, held the candle aloft,

the mulatto, with a curious preparatory writhing movement of the

mighty shoulders, lowered his outstretched fingers to the disordered

bed linen....

I pushed open the cupboard door and thrust out the Browning. As I did

so a dramatic thing happened. A tall, gaunt figure shot suddenly

upright from \_beyond\_ the bed. It was Nayland Smith!

Upraised in his hand he held a heavy walking cane. I knew the handle

to be leaded, and I could judge of the force with which he wielded it

by the fact that it cut the air with a keen \_swishing\_ sound. It

descended upon the back of the mulatto's skull with a sickening thud,

and the great brown body dropped inert upon the padded bed--in which

not Smith, but his grip, reposed. There was no word, no cry. Then--

"Shoot, Petrie! Shoot the fiend! \_Shoot\_!..."

Van Roon, dropping the candle, in the falling gleam of which I saw

the whites of the oblique eyes, turned and leapt from the room with

the agility of a wild cat. The ensuing darkness was split by a streak

of lightning ... and there was Nayland Smith scrambling around the

foot of the bed and making for the door in hot pursuit.

We gained it almost together. Smith had dropped the cane, and now held

his pistol in his hand. Together we fired into the chasm of the

corridor, and in the flash, saw Van Roon hurling himself down the

stairs. He went silently in his stockinged feet, and our own clatter

was drowned by the awful booming of the thunder which now burst over

us again.

Crack!--crack!--crack! Three times our pistols spat venomously after

the flying figure ... then we had crossed the hall below and were in

the wilderness of the night with the rain descending upon us in

sheets. Vaguely I saw the white shirt-sleeves of the fugitive near the

corner of the stone fence. A moment he hesitated, then darted away

inland, not toward Saul, but toward the moor and the cup of the inland

bay.

"Steady, Petrie! steady!" cried Nayland Smith. He ran, panting, beside

me. "It is the path to the mire." He breathed sibilantly between every

few words. "It was out there ... that he hoped to lure us ... with the

cry for help."

A great blaze of lightning illuminated the landscape as far as the eye

could see. Ahead of us a flying shape, hair lank and glistening in the

downpour, followed a faint path skirting that green tongue of morass

which we had noted from the upland.

It was Kegan Van Roon. He glanced over his shoulder, showing a yellow,

terror-stricken face. We were gaining upon him. Darkness fell, and the

thunder cracked and boomed as though the very moor were splitting

about us.

"Another fifty yards, Petrie," breathed Nayland Smith, "and after that

it's uncharted ground."

On we went through the rain and the darkness; then--

"Slow up! slow up!" cried Smith. "It feels soft!"

Indeed, already I had made one false step--and the hungry mire had

fastened upon my foot, almost tripping me.

"Lost the path!"

We stopped dead. The falling rain walled us in. I dared not move, for

I knew that the mire, the devouring mire, stretched, eager, close

about my feet. We were both waiting for the next flash of lightning, I

think, but, before it came, out of the darkness ahead of us rose a cry

that sometimes rings in my ears to this hour. Yet it was no more than

a repetition of that which had called to us, deathfully, awhile

before.

"Help! help! for God's sake help! Quick! I am sinking...."

Nayland Smith grasped my arm furiously.

"We dare not move, Petrie--we dare not move!" he breathed. "It's God's

justice--visible for once."

Then came the lightning; and--ignoring a splitting crash behind us--we

both looked ahead, over the mire.

Just on the edge of the venomous green patch, not thirty yards away, I

saw the head and shoulders and upstretched, appealing arms of Van

Roon. Even as the lightning flickered and we saw him, he was gone;

with one last, long, drawn-out cry, horribly like the mournful wail of

a sea-gull, he was gone!

The eerie light died, and in the instant before the sound of the

thunder came shatteringly, we turned about ... in time to see Cragmire

Tower, a blacker silhouette against the night, topple and fall! A red

glow began to be perceptible above the building. The thunder came

booming through the caverns of space. Nayland Smith lowered his wet

face close to mine and shouted in my ear:

"Kegan Van Roon never returned from China. It was a trap. Those were

two creatures of Dr. Fu-Manchu...."

The thunder died away, hollowly, echoing over the distant sea....

"That light on the moor to-night?"

"You have not learnt the Morse Code, Petrie. It was a signal, and it

read: S M I T H ... S O S."

"Well?"

"I took the chance, as you know. And it was Kâramanèh! She knew of the

plot to bury us in the mire. She had followed from London, but could

do nothing until dusk. God forgive me if I've mis-judged her--for we

owe her our lives to-night."

Flames were bursting up from the building beside the ruin of the

ancient tower which had faced the storms of countless ages only to

succumb at last. The lightning literally had cloven it in twain.

"The mulatto?..."

Again the lightning flashed, and we saw the path and began to retrace

our steps. Nayland Smith turned to me; his face was very grim in that

unearthly light, and his eyes shone like steel.

"I killed him, Petrie ... as I meant to do."

From out over Sedgemoor it came, cracking and rolling and booming

towards us, swelling in volume to a stupendous climax, that awful

laughter of Jove the destroyer of Cragmire Tower.

CHAPTER XXIV

STORY OF THE GABLES

In looking over my notes dealing with the second phase of Dr.

Fu-Manchu's activities in England, I find that one of the worst hours

of my life was associated with the singular and seemingly inconsequent

adventure of the fiery hand. I shall deal with it in this place,

begging you to bear with me if I seem to digress.

Inspector Weymouth called one morning, shortly after the Van Roon

episode, and entered upon a surprising account of a visit to a house

at Hampstead which enjoyed the sinister reputation of being

uninhabitable.

"But in what way does the case enter into your province?" inquired

Nayland Smith, idly tapping out his pipe on a bar of the grate.

We had not long finished breakfast, but from an early hour Smith had

been at his eternal smoking, which only the advent of the meal had

interrupted.

"Well," replied the Inspector, who occupied a big armchair near the

window, "I was sent to look into it, I suppose, because I had nothing

better to do at the moment."

"Ah!" jerked Smith, glancing over his shoulder.

The ejaculation had a veiled significance; for our quest of Dr.

Fu-Manchu had come to an abrupt termination by reason of the fact that

all trace of that malignant genius, and of the group surrounding him,

had vanished with the destruction of Cragmire Tower.

"The house is called The Gables," continued the Scotland Yard man,

"and I knew I was on a wild-goose chase from the first--"

"Why?" snapped Smith.

"Because I was there before, six months ago or so--just before your

present return to England--and I knew what to expect."

Smith looked up with some faint dawning of interest perceptible in his

manner.

"I was unaware," he said with a slight smile, "that the cleaning-up of

haunted houses came within the province of New Scotland Yard. I am

learning something."

"In the ordinary way," replied the big man good-humouredly, "it

doesn't. But a sudden death always excites suspicion, and--"

"A sudden death?" I said, glancing up; "you didn't explain that the

ghost had killed any one!"

"I'm afraid I'm a poor hand at yarn-spinning, doctor," said Weymouth,

turning his blue, twinkling eyes in my direction. "Two people have

died at The Gables within the last six months."

"You begin to interest me," declared Smith, and there came something

of the old, eager look into his gaunt face, as, having lighted his

pipe, he tossed the match-end into the hearth.

"I had hoped for some little excitement, myself," confessed the

Inspector. "This dead-end, with not a shadow of a clue to the

whereabouts of the Yellow fiend, has been getting on my nerves--"

Nayland Smith grunted sympathetically.

"Although Dr. Fu-Manchu had been in England for some months, now,"

continued Weymouth, "I have never set eyes upon him; the house we

raided in Museum Street proved to be empty; in a word, I am wasting my

time. So that I volunteered to run up to Hampstead and look into the

matter of The Gables, principally as a distraction. It's a queer

business, but more in the Psychical Research Society's line than mine,

I'm afraid. Still, if there were no Dr. Fu-Manchu it might be of

interest to you--and to you, Dr. Petrie--because it illustrates the

fact that, given the right sort of subject, death can be brought

about without any elaborate mechanism--such as our Chinese friends

employ."

"You interest me more and more," declared Smith, stretching himself in

the long, white cane rest-chair.

"Two men, both fairly sound, except that the first one had an

asthmatic heart, have died at The Gables without any one laying a

little finger upon them. Oh! there was no jugglery! They weren't

poisoned, or bitten by venomous insects, or suffocated, or anything

like that. They just died of fear--stark fear."

With my elbows resting upon the table cover, and my chin in my hands,

I was listening attentively, now, and Nayland Smith, a big cushion

behind his head, was watching the speaker with a keen and speculative

look in those steely eyes of his.

"You imply that Dr. Fu-Manchu has something to learn from The Gables?"

he jerked.

Weymouth nodded stolidly.

"I can't work up anything like amazement in these days," continued the

latter; "every other case seems stale and hackneyed alongside \_the\_

case. But I must confess that when The Gables came on the books of the

Yard the second time, I began to wonder. I thought there might be some

tangible clue, some link connecting the two victims; perhaps some

evidence of robbery or of revenge--of some sort of motive. In short, I

hoped to find evidence of human agency at work, but, as before, I was

disappointed."

"It's a legitimate case of a haunted house, then?" said Smith.

"Yes; we find them occasionally, these uninhabitable places, where

there is \_something\_, something malignant and harmful to human life,

but something that you cannot arrest, that you cannot hope to bring

into court."

"Ah," replied Smith slowly; "I suppose you are right. There are

historic instances, of course: Glamys Castle and Spedlins Tower in

Scotland, Peel Castle, Isle of Man, with its \_Maudhe Dhug\_, the grey

lady of Rainham Hall, the headless horses of Caistor, the Wesley ghost

of Epworth Rectory and others. But I have never come in personal

contact with such a case, and if I did I should feel very humiliated

to have to confess that there was \_any\_ agency which could produce a

\_physical\_ result--death,--but which was immune from physical

retaliation."

Weymouth nodded his head again.

"\_I\_ might feel a bit sour about it, too," he replied, "if it were not

that I haven't much pride left in these days, considering the show of

physical retaliation I have made against Dr. Fu-Manchu."

"A home-thrust, Weymouth!" snapped Nayland Smith, with one of those

rare boyish laughs of his. "We're children to that Chinese doctor,

Inspector, to that weird product of a weird people who are as old in

evil as the Pyramids are old in mystery. But about The Gables?"

"Well, it's an uncanny place. You mentioned Glamys Castle a moment

ago, and it's possible to understand an old stronghold like that being

haunted, but The Gables was only built about 1870; it's quite a modern

house. It was built for a wealthy Quaker family, and they occupied it,

uninterruptedly and apparently without anything unusual occurring for

over forty years. Then it was sold to a Mr. Maddison--and Mr. Maddison

died there six months ago."

"Maddison?" said Smith sharply, staring across at Weymouth. "What was

he? Where did he come from?"

"He was a retired tea-planter from Colombo," replied the Inspector.

"Colombo?"

"There was a link with the East, certainly, if that's what you are

thinking; and it was this fact which interested me at the time, and

which led me to waste precious days and nights on the case. But there

was no mortal connection between this liverish individual and the

schemes of Dr. Fu-Manchu. I'm certain of that."

"And how did he die?" I asked interestedly.

"He just died in his chair one evening, in the room which he used as a

library. It was his custom to sit there every night, when there were

no visitors, reading, until twelve o'clock or later. He was a

bachelor, and his household consisted of a cook, a housemaid, and a

man who had been with him for thirty years, I believe. At the time of

Mr. Maddison's death, his household had recently been deprived of two

of its members. The cook and housemaid both resigned one morning,

giving as their reason the fact that the place was haunted."

"In what way?"

"I interviewed the precious pair at the time, and they told me absurd

and various tales about dark figures wandering along the corridors and

bending over them in bed at night, whispering; but their chief trouble

was a continuous ringing of bells about the house."

"Bells?"

"They said that it became unbearable. Night and day there were bells

ringing all over the house. At any rate, they went, and for three or

four days The Gables was occupied only by Mr. Maddison and his man,

whose name was Stevens. I interviewed the latter also, and he was an

altogether more reliable witness; a decent, steady sort of man whose

story impressed me very much at the time."

"Did he confirm the ringing?"

"He swore to it--a sort of jangle, sometimes up in the air, near the

ceilings, and sometimes under the floor, like the shaking of silver

bells."

Nayland Smith stood up abruptly and began to pace the room, leaving

great trails of blue-grey smoke behind him.

"Your story is sufficiently interesting, Inspector," he declared,

"even to divert my mind from the eternal contemplation of the

Fu-Manchu problem. This would appear to be distinctly a case of an

'astral bell' such as we sometimes hear of in India."

"It was Stevens," continued Weymouth, "who found Mr. Maddison. He

(Stevens) had been out on business connected with the household

arrangements, and at about eleven o'clock he returned, letting himself

in with a key. There was a light in the library, and getting no

response to his knocking, Stevens entered. He found his master sitting

bolt upright in a chair, clutching the arms with rigid fingers and

staring straight before him with a look of such frightful horror on

his face, that Stevens positively ran from the room and out of the

house. Mr. Maddison was stone dead. When a doctor, who lives at no

great distance away, came and examined him, he could find no trace of

violence whatever; he had apparently died of fright, to judge from the

expression on his face."

"Anything else?"

"Only this: I learnt, indirectly, that the last member of the Quaker

family to occupy the house had apparently witnessed the apparition,

which had led to his vacating the place. I got the story from the wife

of a man who had been employed as gardener there at that time. The

apparition--which he witnessed in the hall-way, if I remember

rightly--took the form of a sort of luminous hand clutching a long,

curved knife."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Smith, and laughed shortly; "that's quite in

order!"

"This gentleman told no one of the occurrence until after he had left

the house, no doubt in order that the place should not acquire an evil

reputation. Most of the original furniture remained, and Mr. Maddison

took the house furnished. I don't think there can be any doubt that

what killed him was fear at seeing a repetition--"

"Of the fiery hand?" concluded Smith.

"Quite so. Well, I examined The Gables pretty closely, and, with

another Scotland Yard man, spent a night in the empty house. We saw

nothing; but once, very faintly, we heard the ringing of bells."

Smith spun around upon him rapidly.

"You can swear to that?" he snapped.

"I can swear to it," declared Weymouth stolidly. "It seemed to be over

our heads. We were sitting in the dining-room. Then it was gone, and

we heard nothing more whatever of an unusual nature. Following the

death of Mr. Maddison, The Gables remained empty until a while ago,

when a French gentleman, named Lejay, leased it--"

"Furnished?"

"Yes; nothing was removed--"

"Who kept the place in order?"

"A married couple living in the neighbourhood undertook to do so. The

man attended to the lawn and so forth, and the woman came once a week,

I believe, to clean up the house."

"And Lejay?"

"He came in only last week, having leased the house for six months.

His family were to have joined him in a day or two, and he, with the

aid of the pair I have just mentioned, and assisted by a French

servant he brought over with him, was putting the place in order. At

about twelve o'clock on the Friday night this servant ran into a

neighbouring house screaming 'the fiery hand!' and when at last a

constable arrived and a frightened group went up the avenue of The

Gables, they found M. Lejay, dead in the avenue, near the steps just

outside the hall door! He had the same face of horror...."

"What a tale for the Press!" snapped Smith.

"The owner has managed to keep it quiet so far, but this time I think

it will leak into the Press--yes."

There was a short silence; then--

"And you have been down to The Gables again?"

"I was there on Saturday, but there's not a scrap of evidence. The man

undoubtedly died of fright in the same way as Maddison. The place

ought to be pulled down; it's unholy."

"Unholy is the word," I said. "I never heard anything like it. This M.

Lejay had no enemies?--there could be no possible motive?"

"None whatever. He was a business man from Marseilles, and his affairs

necessitated his remaining in or near to London for some considerable

time; therefore, he decided to make his headquarters here,

temporarily, and leased The Gables with that intention."

Nayland Smith was pacing the floor with increasing rapidity; he was

tugging at the lobe of his left ear and his pipe had long since gone

out.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BELLS

I started to my feet as a tall, bearded man swung open the door and

hurled himself impetuously into the room. He wore a silk hat, which

fitted him very ill, and a black frock-coat which did not fit him at

all.

"It's all right, Petrie!" cried the apparition; "I've leased The

Gables!"

It was Nayland Smith! I stared at him in amazement.

"The first time I have employed a disguise," continued my friend

rapidly, "since the memorable episode of the false pigtail." He threw

a small brown leather grip upon the floor. "In case you should care to

visit the house, Petrie, I have brought these things. My tenancy

commences to-night!"

Two days had elapsed, and I had entirely forgotten the strange story

of The Gables which Inspector Weymouth had related to us; evidently it

was otherwise with my friend, and utterly at a loss for an explanation

of his singular behaviour, I stooped mechanically and opened the grip.

It contained an odd assortment of garments, and amongst other things

several grey wigs and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

Kneeling there with this strange litter about me, I looked up

amazedly. Nayland Smith, the unsuitable silk hat set right upon the

back of his head, was pacing the room excitedly, his fuming pipe

protruding from the tangle of factitious beard.

"You see, Petrie," he began again, rapidly, "I did not entirely trust

the agent. I've leased the house in the name of Professor Maxton...."

"But, Smith," I cried, "what possible reason can there be for

disguise?"

"There's every reason," he snapped.

"Why should you interest yourself in The Gables?"

"Does no explanation occur to you?"

"None whatever; to me the whole thing smacks of stark lunacy."

"Then you won't come?"

"I've never stuck at anything, Smith," I replied, "however

undignified, when it has seemed that my presence could be of the

slightest use."

As I rose to my feet, Smith stepped in front of me, and the steely

grey eyes shone out strangely from the altered face. He clapped his

hands upon my shoulders.

"If I assure you that your presence is necessary to my safety," he

said, "that if you fail me I must seek another companion--will you

come?"

Intuitively, I knew that he was keeping something back, and I was

conscious of some resentment, but, nevertheless, my reply was a

foregone conclusion, and--with the borrowed appearance of an extremely

untidy old man--I crept guiltily out of my house that evening and into

the cab which Smith had waiting.

The Gables was a roomy and rambling place lying back a considerable

distance from the road. A semi-circular drive gave access to the door,

and so densely wooded was the ground, that for the most part the drive

was practically a tunnel--a verdant tunnel. A high brick wall

concealed the building from the point of view of any one on the

roadway, but either horn of the crescent drive terminated at a heavy,

wrought-iron gateway.

Smith discharged the cab at the corner of the narrow and winding road

upon which The Gables fronted. It was walled in on both sides; on the

left the wall being broken by tradesmen's entrances to the houses

fronting upon another street, and on the right following,

uninterruptedly, the grounds of The Gables. As we came to the gate--

"Nothing now," said Smith, pointing into the darkness of the road

before us, "except a couple of studios, until one comes to the Heath."

He inserted the key in the lock of the gate and swung it creakingly

open. I looked into the black arch of the avenue, thought of the haunted

residence that lay hidden somewhere beyond, of those who had died in

it--especially of the one who had died there under the trees ... and

found myself out of love with the business of the night.

"Come on!" said Nayland Smith briskly, holding the gate open; "there

should be a fire in the library, and refreshments, if the charwoman

has followed instructions."

I heard the great gate clang to behind us. Even had there been any

moon (and there was none) I doubted if more than a patch or two of

light could have penetrated there. The darkness was extraordinary.

Nothing broke it, and I think Smith must have found his way by the aid

of some sixth sense. At any rate, I saw nothing of the house until I

stood some five paces from the steps leading up to the porch. A light

was burning in the hall-way, but dimly and inhospitably; of the façade

of the building I could perceive little.

When we entered the hall and the door was closed behind us, I began

wondering anew what purpose my friend hoped to serve by a vigil in

this haunted place. There was a light in the library, the door of

which was ajar, and on the large table were decanters, a siphon, and

some biscuits and sandwiches. A large grip stood upon the floor also.

For some reason which was a mystery to me, Smith had decided that we

must assume false names whilst under the roof of The Gables; and--

"Now, Pearce," he said, "a whisky-and-soda before we look around?"

The proposal was welcome enough, for I felt strangely dispirited, and,

to tell the truth, in my strange disguise not a little ridiculous.

All my nerves, no doubt, were highly strung, and my sense of hearing

unusually acute, for I went in momentary expectation of some uncanny

happening. I had not long to wait. As I raised the glass to my lips

and glanced across the table at my friend, I heard the first faint

sound heralding the coming of the bells.

It did not seem to proceed from anywhere within the library, but from

some distant room, far away overhead. A musical sound it was, but

breaking in upon the silence of that ill-omened house, its music was

the music of terror. In a faint and very sweet cascade it rippled; a

ringing as of tiny silver bells.

I set down my glass upon the table, and rising slowly from the chair

in which I had been seated, stared fixedly at my companion, who was

staring with equal fixity at me. I could see that I had not been

deluded; Nayland Smith had heard the ringing, too.

"The ghosts waste no time!" he said softly. "This is not new to me; I

spent an hour here last night--and heard the same sound...."

I glanced hastily around the room. It was furnished as a library, and

contained a considerable collection of works, principally novels. I

was unable to judge of the outlook, for the two lofty windows were

draped with heavy purple curtains which were drawn close. A

silk-shaded lamp swung from the centre of the ceiling, and immediately

over the table by which I stood. There was much shadow about the room;

and now I glanced apprehensively about me, but specially toward the

open door.

In that breathless suspense of listening we stood awhile; then--

"There it is again!" whispered Smith tensely.

The ringing of bells was repeated, and seemingly much nearer to us; in

fact it appeared to come from somewhere above, up near the ceiling of

the room in which we stood. Simultaneously we looked up, then Smith

laughed shortly.

"Instinctive, I suppose," he snapped; "but what do we expect to see in

the air?"

The musical sound now grew in volume; the first tiny peal seemed to be

reinforced by others and by others again, until the air around about

us was filled with the pealings of these invisible bell-ringers.

Although, as I have said, the sound was rather musical than horrible,

it was, on the other hand, so utterly unaccountable as to touch the

supreme heights of the uncanny. I could not doubt that our presence

had attracted these unseen ringers to the room in which we stood, and

I knew quite well that I was growing pale. This was the room in which

at least one unhappy occupant of The Gables had died of fear. I

recognized the fact that if this mere overture were going to affect my

nerves to such an extent, I could not hope to survive the ordeal of

the night; a great effort was called for. I emptied my glass at a

draught, and stared across the table at Nayland Smith with a sort of

defiance. He was standing very upright and motionless, but his eyes

were turning right and left, searching every visible corner of the big

room.

"Good!" he said in a very low voice. "The terrorizing power of the

Unknown is boundless, but we must not get in the grip of panic, or we

could not hope to remain in this house ten minutes."

I nodded without speaking. Then Smith, to my amazement, suddenly began

to speak in a loud voice, a marked contrast to that, almost a whisper,

in which he had spoken formerly.

"My dear Pearce," he cried, "do you hear the ringing of bells?"

Clearly the latter words were spoken for the benefit of the unseen

intelligence controlling these manifestations; and although I regarded

such finesse as somewhat wasted, I followed my friend's lead and

replied in a voice as loud as his own:

"Distinctly, Professor!"

Silence followed my words, a silence in which both stood watchful and

listening. Then, very faintly, I seemed to detect the silvern ringing

receding away through distant rooms. Finally it became inaudible, and

in the stillness of The Gables I could distinctly hear my companion

breathing. For fully ten minutes we two remained thus, each

momentarily expecting a repetition of the ringing, or the coming of

some new and more sinister manifestation. But we heard nothing and saw

nothing.

"Hand me that grip, and don't stir until I come back!" hissed Smith in

my ear.

He turned and walked out of the library, his boots creaking very

loudly in that awe-inspiring silence.

Standing beside the table, I watched the open door for his return,

crushing down a dread that \_another\_ form than his might suddenly

appear there.

I could hear him moving from room to room, and presently, as I waited

in hushed, tense watchfulness, he came in, depositing the grip upon

the table. His eyes were gleaming feverishly.

"The house is haunted, Pearce!" he cried. "But no ghost ever

frightened \_me\_! Come, I will show you your room."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FIERY HAND

Smith walked ahead of me upstairs; he had snapped up the light in the

hall-way, and now he turned and cried back loudly:

"I fear we should never get servants to stay here."

Again I detected the appeal to a hidden Audience; and there was

something very uncanny in the idea. The house now was deathly still;

the ringing had entirely subsided. In the upper corridor my companion,

who seemed to be well acquainted with the position of the switches,

again turned up all the lights, and in pursuit of the strange comedy

which he saw fit to enact, addressed me continuously in the loud and

unnatural voice which he had adopted as part of his disguise.

We looked into a number of rooms all well and comfortably furnished,

but although my imagination may have been responsible for the idea,

they all seemed to possess a chilly and repellent atmosphere. I felt

that to essay sleep in any one of them would be the merest farce, that

the place to all intents and purposes was uninhabitable, that

something incalculably evil presided over the house.

And through it all, so obtuse was I that no glimmer of the truth

entered my mind. Outside again in the long, brightly lighted corridor,

we stood for a moment as if a mutual anticipation of some new event

pending had come to us. It was curious--that sudden pulling up and

silent questioning of one another; because, although we acted thus, no

sound had reached us. A few seconds later our anticipation was

realized. From the direction of the stairs it came--a low wailing in a

woman's voice; and the sweetness of the tones added to the terror of

the sound. I clutched at Smith's arm convulsively whilst that uncanny

cry rose and fell--rose and fell--and died away.

Neither of us moved immediately. My mind was working with feverish

rapidity and seeking to run down a memory which the sound had stirred

into faint quickness. My heart was still leaping wildly when the

wailing began again, rising and falling in regular cadence. At that

instant I identified it.

During the time Smith and I had spent together in Egypt, two years

before, searching for Kâramanèh, I had found myself on one occasion in

the neighbourhood of a native cemetery near to Bedrasheen. Now, the

scene which I had witnessed there rose up again vividly before me, and

I seemed to see a little group of black-robed women clustered together

about a native grave; for the wailing which now was dying away again

in The Gables was the same, or almost the same, as the wailing of

those Egyptian mourners.

The house was very silent, now. My forehead was damp with

perspiration, and I became more and more convinced that the uncanny

ordeal must prove too much for my nerves. Hitherto, I had accorded

little credence to tales of the supernatural, but face to face with

such manifestations as these, I realized that I would have faced

rather a group of armed dacoits, nay! Dr. Fu-Manchu himself, than have

remained another hour in that ill-omened house.

My companion must have read as much in my face. But he kept up the

strange and, to me, purposeless comedy when presently he spoke.

"I feel it to be incumbent upon me to suggest," he said, "that we

spend the night at an hotel after all."

He walked rapidly downstairs and into the library and began to strap

up the grip.

"Yet," he said, "there may be a natural explanation of what we've

heard; for it is noteworthy that we have actually \_seen\_ nothing. It

might even be possible to get used to the ringing and the wailing

after a time. Frankly, I am loath to go back on my bargain!"

Whilst I stared at him in amazement, he stood there indeterminate as

it seemed. Then--

"Come, Pearce!" he cried loudly, "I can see that you do not share my

views; but for my own part I shall return to-morrow and devote further

attention to the phenomena."

Extinguishing the light, he walked out into the hall-way, carrying the

grip in his hand. I was not far behind him. We walked toward the door

together, and--

"Turn the light out, Pearce," directed Smith; "the switch is at your

elbow. We can see our way to the door well enough, now."

In order to carry out these instructions, it became necessary for me

to remain a few paces in the rear of my companion, and I think I have

never experienced such a pang of nameless terror as pierced me at the

moment of extinguishing the light; for Smith had not yet opened the

door, and the utter darkness of The Gables was horrible beyond

expression. Surely darkness is the most potent weapon of the Unknown.

I know that at the moment my hand left the switch I made for the door

as though the hosts of hell pursued me. I collided violently with

Smith. He was evidently facing toward me in the darkness, for at the

moment of our collision he grasped my shoulder as in a vice.

"My God, Petrie! look behind you!" he whispered.

I was enabled to judge of the extent and reality of his fear by the

fact that the strange subterfuge of addressing me always as Pearce was

forgotten. I turned in a flash....

Never can I forget what I saw. Many strange and terrible memories are

mine, memories stranger and more terrible than those of the average

man; but this \_thing\_ which now moved slowly down upon us through the

impenetrable gloom of that haunted place was (if the term be

understood) almost absurdly horrible. It was a mediæval legend come to

life in modern London; it was as though some horrible chimera of the

black and ignorant past was become create and potent in the present.

A luminous hand--a hand in the veins of which fire seemed to run so

that the texture of the skin and the shape of the bones within were

perceptible--in short a hand of glowing, fiery flesh, clutching a

short knife or dagger which also glowed with the same hellish,

infernal luminance, was advancing upon us where we stood--was not

three paces removed!

What I did or how I came to do it, I can never recall. In all my years

I have experienced nothing to equal the stark panic which seized upon

me then. I know that I uttered a loud and frenzied cry: I know that I

tore myself like a madman from Smith's restraining grip....

"Don't touch it! Keep away, for your life!" I heard....

But, dimly I recollect that, finding the thing approaching yet

nearer, I lashed out with my fists--madly, blindly--and struck

something palpable....

What was the result, I cannot say. At that point my recollections

merge into confusion. Something or some one (Smith, as I afterwards

discovered) was hauling me by main force through the darkness; I fell

a considerable distance on to gravel which lacerated my hands and

gashed my knees. Then, with the cool night air fanning my brow, I was

running--running--my breath coming in hysterical sobs. Beside me fled

another figure.... And my definite recollections commence again at

that point. For this companion of my flight from The Gables threw

himself roughly against me to alter my course.

"Not that way! not that way!" came pantingly. "Not on to the Heath ...

we must keep to the roads...."

It was Nayland Smith. That healing realization came to me, bringing

such a gladness as no word of mine can express nor convey. Still we

ran on.

"There's a policeman's lantern," panted my companion. "They'll attempt

nothing, now!"

\* \* \* \* \*

I gulped down the stiff brandy-and-soda, then glanced across to where

Nayland Smith lay extended in the long cane chair.

"Perhaps you will explain," I said, "for what purpose you submitted me

to that ordeal. If you proposed to correct my scepticism concerning

supernatural manifestations, you have succeeded."

"Yes," said my companion musingly, "they are devilishly clever; but we

knew that already."

I stared at him, fatuously.

"Have you ever known me to waste my time when there was important work

to do?" he continued. "Do you seriously believe that my ghost-hunting

was undertaken for amusement? Really, Petrie, although you are very

fond of assuring me that I need a holiday, I think the shoe is on the

other foot!"

From the pocket of his dressing-gown he took out a piece of silk

fringe which had apparently been torn from a scarf, and rolling it

into a ball, tossed it across to me.

"Smell!" he snapped.

I did as he directed--and gave a great start. The silk exhaled a faint

perfume, but its effect upon me was as though someone had cried aloud:

"\_Kâramanèh!\_"

Beyond doubt the silken fragment had belonged to the beautiful servant

of Dr. Fu-Manchu, to the dark-eyed, seductive Kâramanèh. Nayland Smith

was watching me keenly.

"You recognize it--yes?"

I placed the piece of silk upon the table, slightly shrugging my

shoulders.

"It was sufficient evidence in itself," continued my friend, "but I

thought it better to seek confirmation, and the obvious way was to

pose as a new lessee of The Gables...."

"But, Smith--" I began.

"Let me explain, Petrie. The history of The Gables seemed to be

susceptible of only one explanation; in short it was fairly evident to

me that the object of the manifestations was to ensure the place being

kept empty. This idea suggested another, and with them both in mind, I

set out to make my inquiries, first taking the precaution to disguise

my identity, to which end Weymouth gave me the freedom of Scotland

Yard's fancy wardrobe. I did not take the agent into my confidence,

but posed as a stranger who had heard that the house was to let

furnished and thought it might suit his purpose. My inquiries were

directed to a particular end, but I failed to achieve it at the time.

I had theories, as I have said, and when, having paid the deposit and

secured possession of the keys, I was enabled to visit the place

alone, I was fortunate enough to obtain evidence to show that my

imagination had not misled me.

"You were very curious the other morning, I recall, respecting my

object in borrowing a large brace-and-bit. My object, Petrie, was to

bore a series of holes in the wainscoting of various rooms at The

Gables--in inconspicuous positions, of course...."

"But, my dear Smith!" I cried, "you are merely adding to my

mystification."

He stood up and began to pace the room in his restless fashion.

"I had cross-examined Weymouth closely regarding the phenomenon of the

bell-ringing, and an exhaustive search of the premises led to the

discovery that the house was in such excellent condition that, from

ground-floor to attic, there was not a solitary crevice large enough

to admit of the passage of a mouse."

I suppose I must have been staring very foolishly indeed, for Nayland

Smith burst into one of his sudden laughs.

"A mouse, I said, Petrie!" he cried. "With the brace-and-bit I

rectified that matter. I made the holes I have mentioned, and before

each I set a trap baited with a piece of succulent, toasted cheese.

Just open that grip!"

The light at last was dawning upon my mental darkness, and I pounced

upon the grip, which stood upon a chair near the window, and opened

it. A sickly smell of cooked cheese assailed my nostrils.

"Mind your fingers!" cried Smith; "some of them are still set,

possibly."

Out from the grip I began to take \_mouse-traps\_! Two or three of them

were still set, but in the case of the greater number the catches had

slipped. Nine I took out and placed upon the table, and all were

empty. In the tenth there crouched, panting, its soft furry body dank

with perspiration, a little white mouse!

"Only one capture!" cried my companion, "showing how well fed the

creatures were. Examine his tail!"

But already I had perceived that to which Smith would draw my

attention, and the mystery of the "astral bells" was a mystery no

longer. Bound to the little creature's tail, close to the root, with

fine soft wire such as is used for making up bouquets, were three tiny

silver bells. I looked across at my companion in speechless surprise.

"Almost childish, is it not?" he said; "yet by means of this simple

device The Gables had been emptied of occupant after occupant. There

was small chance of the trick being detected, for, as I have said,

there was absolutely no aperture from roof to basement by means of

which one of them could have escaped into the building."

"Then--"

"They were admitted into the wall cavities and the rafters, from some

cellar underneath, Petrie, to which, after a brief scamper under the

floors and over the ceilings, they instinctively returned for the food

they were accustomed to receive, and for which, even had it been

possible (which it was not), they had no occasion to forage."

I, too, stood up; for excitement was growing within me. I took up the

piece of silk from the table.

"Where did you find this?" I asked, my eyes upon Smith's keen face.

"In a sort of wine cellar, Petrie," he replied, "under the stair.

There is no cellar proper to The Gables--at least no such cellar

appears in the plans."

"But--"

"But there \_is\_ one beyond doubt--yes! It must be part of some older

building which occupied the site before The Gables was built. One can

only surmise that it exists, although such a surmise is a fairly safe

one, and the entrance to the subterranean portion of the building is

situated beyond doubt in the wine cellar. Of this we have at least two

evidences: the finding of the fragment of silk there, and the fact

that in one case at least--as I learnt--the light was extinguished in

the library unaccountably. This could only have been done in one way:

by manipulating the main switch, which is also in the wine cellar."

"But, Smith!" I cried, "do you mean that \_Fu-Manchu\_ ...?"

Nayland Smith turned in his promenade of the floor, and stared into my

eyes.

"I mean that Dr. Fu-Manchu has had a hiding-place under The Gables for

an indefinite period!" he replied. "I always suspected that a man of

his genius would have a second retreat prepared for him, anticipating

the event of the first being discovered. Oh! I don't doubt it! The

place probably is extensive, and I am almost certain--though the point

has to be confirmed--that there is another entrance from the studio

further along the road. We know, now, why our recent searchings in the

East End have proved futile; why the house in Museum Street was

deserted: he has been lying low in this burrow at Hampstead!"

"But the hand, Smith, the luminous hand...."

Nayland Smith laughed shortly.

"Your superstitious fears overcame you to such an extent, Petrie--and

I don't wonder at it; the sight was a ghastly one--that probably you

don't remember what occurred when you struck out at that same ghostly

hand?"

"I seemed to hit something."

"That was why we ran. But I think our retreat had all the appearance

of a rout, as I intended that it should. Pardon my playing upon your

very natural fears, old man, but you could not have \_simulated\_ panic

half so naturally! And if they had suspected that the device was

discovered, we might never have quitted The Gables alive. It was

touch-and-go for a moment."

"But--"

"Turn out the light!" snapped my companion.

Wondering greatly, I did as he desired. I turned out the light ... and

in the darkness of my study I saw a fiery fist being shaken at me

threateningly!... The bones were distinctly visible, and the

luminosity of the flesh was truly ghastly.

"Turn on the light again!" cried Smith.

Deeply mystified, I did so ... and my friend tossed a little electric

pocket-lamp on to the writing table.

"They used merely a small electric lamp fitted into the handle of a

glass dagger," he said with a sort of contempt. "It was very

effective, but the luminous hand is a phenomenon producible by anyone

who possesses an electric torch."

"The Gables will be watched?"

"At last, Petrie, I think we have Fu-Manchu--in his own trap!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE NIGHT OF THE RAID

"Dash it all, Petrie!" cried Smith, "this is most annoying!"

The bell was ringing furiously, although midnight was long past. Whom

could my late visitor be? Almost certainly this ringing portended an

urgent case. In other words, I was not fated to take part in what I

anticipated would prove to be the closing scene of the Fu-Manchu

drama.

"Every one is in bed," I said ruefully; "and how can I possibly see a

patient--in this costume?"

Smith and I were both arrayed in rough tweeds, and anticipating the

labours before us, had dispensed with collars and wore soft mufflers.

It was hard to be called upon to face a professional interview dressed

thus, and having a big tweed cap pulled down over my eyes.

Across the writing-table we confronted one another, in dismayed

silence, whilst, below, the bell sent up its ceaseless clangour.

"It has to be done, Smith," I said regretfully. "Almost certainly it

means a journey and probably an absence of some hours."

I threw my cap upon the table, turned up my coat to hide the absence

of collar, and started for the door. My last sight of Smith showed him

standing looking after me, tugging at the lobe of his ear and clicking

his teeth together with suppressed irritability. I stumbled down the

dark stairs, along the hall, and opened the front door. Vaguely

visible in the light of a street lamp which stood at no great distance

away, I saw a slender man of medium height confronting me. From the

shadowed face two large and luminous eyes looked out into mine. My

visitor, who, despite the warmth of the evening, wore a heavy

greatcoat, was an Oriental!

I drew back, apprehensively; then:--

"Ah! Dr. Petrie!" he said in a softly musical voice which made me

start again, "to God be all praise that I have found you!"

Some emotion, which at present I could not define, was stirring within

me. Where had I seen this graceful Eastern youth before? Where had I

heard that soft voice?

"Do you wish to see me professionally?" I asked--yet even as I put

the question, I seemed to know it unnecessary.

"So you know me no more?" said the stranger--and his teeth gleamed in

a slight smile.

Heavens! I knew now what had struck that vibrant chord within me! The

voice, though infinitely deeper, yet had an unmistakable resemblance

to the dulcet tones of Kâramanèh--of Kâramanèh, whose eyes haunted my

dreams, whose beauty had done much to embitter my years.

The Oriental youth stepped forward, with outstretched hand.

"So you know me no more?" he repeated; "but I know \_you\_, and give

praise to Allah that I have found you!"

I stepped back, pressed the electric switch, and turned, with leaping

heart, to look into the face of my visitor. It was a face of the

purest Greek beauty, a face that might have served as a model for

Praxiteles; the skin had a golden pallor, which, with the crisp black

hair and magnetic yet velvety eyes, suggested to my fancy that this

was the young Antinoüs risen from the Nile, whose wraith now appeared

to me out of the night. I stifled a cry of surprise, not unmingled

with gladness.

It was Azîz--the brother of Kâramanèh!

Never could the entrance of a figure upon the stage of a drama have

been more dramatic than the coming of Azîz upon this night of all

nights. I seized the outstretched hand and drew him forward, then

reclosed the door and stood before him a moment in doubt.

A vaguely troubled look momentarily crossed the handsome face; with

the Oriental's unerring instinct, he had detected the reserve of my

greeting. Yet, when I thought of the treachery of Kâramanèh, when I

remembered how she, whom we had befriended, whom we had rescued from

the house of Fu-Manchu, now had turned like the beautiful viper that

she was to strike at the hand that caressed her; when I thought how

to-night we were set upon raiding the place where the evil Chinese

doctor lurked in hiding, were set upon the arrest of that malignant

genius and of all his creatures, Kâramanèh amongst them, is it strange

that I hesitated? Yet, again, when I thought of my last meeting with

her, and of how, twice, she had risked her life to save me....

So, avoiding the gaze of the lad, I took his arm, and in silence we

two ascended the stairs and entered my study ... where Nayland Smith

stood bolt upright beside the table, his steely eyes fixed upon the

face of the new arrival.

No look of recognition crossed the bronzed features, and Azîz, who had

started forward with outstretched hands, fell back a step and looked

pathetically from me to Nayland Smith, and from the grim Commissioner

back again to me. The appeal in the velvet eyes was more than I could

tolerate, unmoved.

"Smith," I said shortly, "you remember Azîz?"

Not a muscle visibly moved in Smith's face, as he snapped back:

"I remember him perfectly."

"He has come, I think, to seek our assistance."

"Yes, yes!" cried Azîz, laying his hand upon my arm with a gesture

painfully reminiscent of Kâramanèh--"I came only to-night to London.

Oh, my gentlemen! I have searched, and searched, and searched, until I

am weary. Often I have wished to die. And then at last I come to

Rangoon...."

"To Rangoon!" snapped Smith, still with the grey eyes fixed almost

fiercely upon the lad's face.

"To Rangoon--yes; and there I hear news at last. I hear that you have

seen her--have seen Kâramanèh--that you are back in London." He was

not entirely at home with his English. "I know then that she must be

here, too. I ask them everywhere, and they answer 'yes.' Oh, Smith

Pasha!"--he stepped forward and impulsively seized both Smith's

hands--"You know where she is--take me to her!"

Smith's face was a study in perplexity now. In the past we had

befriended the young Azîz, and it was hard to look upon him in the

light of an enemy. Yet had we not equally befriended his sister?--and

she....

At last Smith glanced across at me where I stood just within the

doorway.

"What do you make of it, Petrie?" he said harshly. "Personally I take

it to mean that our plans have leaked out." He sprang suddenly back

from Azîz, and I saw his glance travelling rapidly over the slight

figure as if in quest of concealed arms. "I take it to be a trap!"

A moment he stood so, regarding him, and despite my well-grounded

distrust of the Oriental character, I could have sworn that the

expression of pained surprise upon the youth's face was not simulated

but real. Even Smith, I think, began to share my view; for suddenly he

threw himself into the white cane rest-chair, and, still fixedly

regarding Azîz:

"Perhaps I have wronged you," he said. "If I have, you shall know the

reason presently. Tell your own story!"

There was a pathetic humidity in the velvet eyes of Azîz--eyes so like

those others that were ever looking into mine in dreams--as glancing

from Smith to me he began, hands outstretched, characteristically,

palms upward and fingers curling, to tell in broken English the story

of his search for Kâramanèh....

"It was Fu-Manchu, my kind gentlemen--it was the \_hâkîm\_ who is really

not a man at all, but an \_efreet\_. He found us again less than four

days after you had left us, Smith Pasha!... He found us in Cairo, and

to Kâramanèh he made the forgetting of all things--even of me--even of

me...."

Nayland Smith snapped his teeth together sharply; then:

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

For my own part I understood well enough, remembering how the

brilliant Chinese doctor once had performed such an operation as this

upon poor Inspector Weymouth; how, by means of an injection of some

serum, prepared (as Kâramanèh afterwards told us) from the venom of a

swamp adder or similar reptile, he had induced \_amnesia\_, or complete

loss of memory. I felt every drop of blood recede from my cheeks.

"Smith!" I began....

"Let him speak for himself," interrupted my friend sharply.

"They tried to take us both," continued Azîz, still speaking in that

soft, melodious manner, but with deep seriousness. "I escaped, I, who

am swift of foot, hoping to bring help."--He shook his head

sadly--"But, except the All Powerful, who is so powerful as the

\_Hâkîm\_ Fu-Manchu? I hid, my gentlemen, and watched and waited,

one--two--three weeks. At last I saw her again, my sister Kâramanèh;

but ah! she did not know me, did not know \_me\_, Azîz, her brother! She

was in an \_arabeeyeh\_, and passed me quickly along the \_Sharia

en-Nahhâsin\_. I ran, and ran, and ran, crying her name, but although

she looked back, she did not know me--she did not know me! I felt that

I was dying, and presently I fell--upon the steps of the Mosque of

Abu."

He dropped the expressive hands wearily to his sides and sank his chin

upon his breast.

"And then?" I said huskily--for my heart was fluttering like a captive

bird.

"Alas! from that day to this I see her no more, my gentlemen. I travel

not only in Egypt but near and far, and still I see her no more until

in Rangoon I hear that which brings me to England again"--he extended

his palms naïvely--"and here I am--Smith Pasha."

Smith sprang upright again and turned to me.

"Either I am growing over-credulous," he said, "or Azîz speaks the

truth. But"--he held up his hand--"you can tell me all that at some

other time, Petrie! We must take no chances. Sergeant Carter is

downstairs with the cab; you might ask him to step up. He and Azîz can

remain here until our return."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SAMURAI'S SWORD

The muffled drumming of sleepless London seemed very remote from us,

as side by side we crept up the narrow path to the studio. This was a

starry but moonless night, and the little dingy white building with a

solitary tree peeping, in silhouette above its glazed roof, bore an

odd resemblance to one of those tombs which form a city of the dead so

near to the city of feverish life, on the slopes of the Mokattam

Hills. This line of reflection proved unpleasant, and I dismissed it

sternly from my mind.

The shriek of a train-whistle reached me, a sound which breaks the

stillness of the most silent London night, telling of the ceaseless,

febrile life of the great world-capital whose activity ceases not with

the coming of darkness. Around and about us a very great stillness

reigned, however, and the velvet dusk--which, with the star-jewelled

sky, was strongly suggestive of an Eastern night--gave up no sign to

show that it masked the presence of more than twenty men. Some

distance away on our right was The Gables, that sinister and deserted

mansion which we assumed, and with good reason, to be nothing less

than the gateway to the subterranean abode of Dr. Fu Manchu; before us

was the studio, which, if Nayland Smith's deductions were accurate,

concealed a second entrance to the same mysterious dwelling.

As my friend, glancing cautiously all about him, inserted the key in

the lock, an owl hooted dismally almost immediately above our heads. I

caught my breath sharply, for it might be a signal; but, looking

upward, I saw a great black shape float slantingly from the tree

beyond the studio into the coppice on the right which hemmed in The

Gables. Silently the owl winged its uncanny flight into the greater

darkness of the trees, and was gone. Smith opened the door and we

stepped into the studio. Our plans had been well considered, and in

accordance with these, I now moved up beside my friend, who was dimly

perceptible to me in the starlight which found access through the

glass roof, and pressed the catch of my electric pocket-lamp....

I suppose that by virtue of my self-imposed duty as chronicler of the

deeds of Dr. Fu Manchu--the greatest and most evil genius whom the

later centuries have produced, the man who dreamt of a universal

Yellow Empire--I should have acquired a certain facility in describing

bizarre happenings. But I confess that it fails me now as I attempt in

cold English to portray my emotions when the white beam from the

little lamp cut through the darkness of the studio, and shone fully

upon the beautiful face of \_Kâramanèh\_!

Less than six feet away from me she stood, arrayed in the gauzy dress

of the harêm, her fingers and slim white arms laden with barbaric

jewelry! The light wavered in my suddenly nerveless hand, gleaming

momentarily upon bare ankles and golden anklets, upon little

red-leather shoes.

I spoke no word, and Smith was as silent as I; both of us, I think,

were speechless rather from amazement than in obedience to the

evident wishes of Fu-Manchu's slave-girl. Yet I have only to close my

eyes at this moment to see her as she stood, one finger raised to her

lips, enjoining us to silence. She looked ghastly pale in the light of

the lamp, but so lovely that my rebellious heart threatened already to

make a fool of me.

So we stood in that untidy studio, with canvases and easels heaped

against the wall and with all sorts of litter about us, a trio

strangely met, and one to have amused the high gods watching through

the windows of the stars.

"Go back!" came in a whisper from Kâramanèh.

I saw the red lips moving and read a dreadful horror in the widely

opened eyes, in those eyes like pools of mystery to taunt the thirsty

soul. The world of realities was slipping past me; I seemed to be

losing my hold on things actual; I had built up an Eastern palace

about myself and Kâramanèh, wherein, the world shut out, I might pass

the hours in reading the mystery of those dark eyes. Nayland Smith

brought me sharply to my senses.

"Steady with the light, Petrie!" he hissed in my ear. "My scepticism

has been shaken to-night, but I am taking no chances."

He moved from my side and forward toward that lovely, unreal figure

which stood immediately before the model's throne and its background

of plush curtains. Kâramanèh started forward to meet him, suppressing

a little cry, whose real anguish could not have been simulated.

"Go back! go back!" she whispered urgently, and thrust out her hands

against Smith's breast. "For God's sake, go back! I have risked my

life to come here to-night. \_He knows\_, and is ready...."

The words were spoken with passionate intensity, and Nayland Smith

hesitated. To my nostrils was wafted that faint, delightful perfume

which, since one night, two years ago, it had come to disturb my

senses, had taunted me many times as the mirage taunts the parched

Sahara traveller. I took a step forward.

"Don't move!" snapped Smith.

Kâramanèh clutched frenziedly at the lapels of his coat.

"Listen to me!" she said beseechingly, and stamped one little foot

upon the floor--"listen to me! You are a clever man, but you know

nothing of a woman's heart--nothing--\_nothing\_--if seeing me, hearing

me, knowing, as you do know, what I risk, you can doubt that I speak

the truth. And I tell you that it is death to go behind those

curtains--that \_he\_...."

"That's what I wanted to know!" snapped Smith. His voice quivered with

excitement.

Suddenly grasping Kâramanèh by the waist, he lifted her and set her

aside; then in three bounds he was on to the model's throne and had

torn the plush curtains bodily from their fastenings.

How it occurred I cannot hope to make clear, for here my recollections

merge into a chaos. I know that Smith seemed to topple forward amid

the purple billows of velvet, and his muffled cry came to me:

"Petrie! My God, Petrie!..."

The pale face of Kâramanèh looked up into mine and her hands were

clutching me, but the glamour of her personality had lost its hold,

for I knew--heavens how poignantly it struck home to me!--that Nayland

Smith was gone to his death. What I hoped to achieve, I know not, but

hurling the trembling girl aside, I snatched the Browning pistol from

my coat pocket, and with the ray of the lamp directed upon the purple

mound of velvet, I leaped forward.

I think I realized that the curtains had masked a collapsible trap, a

sheer pit of blackness, an instant before I was precipitated into it,

but certainly the knowledge came too late. With the sound of a soft,

shuddering cry in my ears, I fell, dropping lamp and pistol, and

clutching at the fallen hangings. But they offered me no support. My

head seemed to be bursting; I could utter only a hoarse groan, as I

fell--fell--fell....

\* \* \* \* \*

When my mind began to work again, in returning consciousness, I found

it to be laden with reproach. How often in the past had we blindly

hurled ourselves into just such a trap as this? Should we never learn

that, where Fu-Manchu was, impetuosity must prove fatal? On two

distinct occasions in the past we had been made the victims of this

device, yet although we had had practically conclusive evidence that

this studio was used by Dr. Fu-Manchu, we had relied upon its floor

being as secure as that of any other studio, we had failed to sound

every foot of it ere trusting our weight to its support....

"There is such a divine simplicity in the English mind that one may

lay one's plans with mathematical precision, and rely upon the Nayland

Smiths and Dr. Petries to play their allotted parts. Excepting two

faithful followers, my friends are long since departed. But here, in

these vaults which time has overlooked and which are as secret and as

serviceable to-day as they were two hundred years ago, I wait

patiently, with my trap set, like the spider for the fly!..."

To the sound of that taunting voice, I opened my eyes. As I did so I

strove to spring upright--only to realize that I was tied fast to a

heavy ebony chair inlaid with ivory, and attached by means of two iron

brackets to the floor.

"Even children learn from experience," continued the unforgettable

voice, alternately guttural and sibilant, but always as deliberate as

though the speaker were choosing with care words which should

perfectly clothe his thoughts. "For 'a burnt child fears the fire,'

says your English adage. But Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith, who

enjoys the confidence of the India Office, and who is empowered to

control the movements of the Criminal Investigation Department, learns

nothing from experience. He is less than a child, since he has twice

rashly precipitated himself into a chamber charged with an anæsthetic

prepared, by a process of my own, from the \_lycoperdon\_ or Common

Puffball."

I became fully master of my senses, and I became fully alive to a

stupendous fact. At last it was ended; we were utterly in the power of

Dr. Fu Manchu; our race was run.

I sat in a low vaulted room. The roof was of ancient brickwork, but

the walls were draped with exquisite Chinese fabric having a green

ground whereon was a design representing a grotesque procession of

white peacocks. A green carpet covered the floor, and the whole of the

furniture was of the same material as the chair to which I was

strapped, viz. ebony inlaid with ivory. This furniture was scanty.

There was a heavy table in one corner of the dungeonesque place, on

which were a number of books and papers. Before this table was a

high-backed, heavily carven chair. A smaller table stood upon the

right of the only visible opening, a low door partially draped with

bead-work curtains, above which hung a silver lamp. On this smaller

table, a stick of incense, in a silver holder, sent up a pencil of

vapour into the air, and the chamber was loaded with the sickly sweet

fumes. A faint haze from the incense-stick hovered up under the roof.

In the high-backed chair sat Dr. Fu Manchu, wearing a green robe upon

which was embroidered a design, the subject of which at first glance

was not perceptible, but which presently I made out to be a huge white

peacock. He wore a little cap perched upon the dome of his amazing

skull, and one clawish hand resting upon the ebony of the table, he

sat slightly turned toward me, his emotionless face a mask of

incredible evil. In spite of, or because of, the high intellect

written upon it, the face of Dr. Fu-Manchu was more utterly repellent

than any I have ever known, and the green eyes, eyes green as those of

a cat in the darkness, which sometimes burnt like witch-lamps, and

sometimes were horribly filmed like nothing human or imaginable, might

have mirrored not a soul, but an emanation of Hell, incarnate in this

gaunt, high-shouldered body.

Stretched flat upon the floor lay Nayland Smith, partially stripped,

his arms thrown back over his head and his wrists chained to a stout

iron staple attached to the wall; he was fully conscious and staring

intently at the Chinese doctor. His bare ankles also were manacled,

and fixed to a second chain, which quivered tautly across the green

carpet and passed out through the doorway, being attached to something

beyond the curtain, and invisible to me from where I sat.

Fu-Manchu was now silent. I could hear Smith's heavy breathing and

hear my watch ticking in my pocket. I suddenly realized that although

my body was lashed to the ebony chair, my hands and arms were free.

Next, looking dazedly about me, my attention was drawn to a heavy

sword which stood hilt upward against the wall within reach of my

hand. It was a magnificent piece, of Japanese workmanship; a long,

curved Damascened blade having a double-handed hilt of steel, inlaid

with gold, and resembling fine Kuft work. A host of possibilities

swept through my mind. Then I perceived that the sword was attached to

the wall by a thin steel chain some five feet in length.

"Even if you had the dexterity of a Mexican knife-thrower," came the

guttural voice of Fu-Manchu, "you would be unable to reach me, dear

Dr. Petrie."

The Chinaman had read my thoughts.

Smith turned his eyes upon me momentarily, only to look away again in

the direction of Fu Manchu. My friend's face was slightly pale beneath

the tan, and his jaw muscles stood out with unusual prominence. By

this fact alone did he reveal the knowledge that he lay at the mercy

of this enemy of the white race, of this inhuman being who himself

knew no mercy, of this man whose very genius was inspired by the cool,

calculated cruelty of his race, of that race which to this day

disposes of hundreds, nay, thousands, of its unwanted girl-children by

the simple measure of throwing them down a well specially dedicated to

the purpose.

"The weapon near your hand," continued the Chinaman imperturbably, "is

a product of the civilization of our near neighbours the Japanese, a

race to whose courage I prostrate myself in meekness. It is the sword

of a \_samurai\_, Dr. Petrie. It is of very great age, and was, until an

unfortunate misunderstanding with myself led to the extinction of the

family, a treasured possession of a noble Japanese house...."

The soft voice, into which an occasional sibilance crept, but which

never rose above a cool monotone, gradually was lashing me into fury,

and I could see the muscles moving in Smith's jaws as he convulsively

clenched his teeth; whereby I knew that, impotent, he burned with a

rage at least as great as mine. But I did not speak, and did not move.

"The ancient tradition of \_seppuku\_," continued the Chinaman, "or

\_hara-kira\_, still rules, as you know, in the great families of Japan.

There is a sacred ritual, and the \_samurai\_ who dedicates himself to

this honourable end, must follow strictly the ritual. As a physician,

the exact nature of the ceremony might possibly interest you, Dr.

Petrie, but a technical account of the two incisions which the

sacrificant employs in his self-dismissal, might, on the other hand,

bore Mr. Nayland Smith. Therefore I will merely enlighten you upon

one little point, a minor one, but interesting to the student of human

nature. In short, even a \_samurai\_--and no braver race has ever

honoured the world--sometimes hesitates to complete the operation. The

weapon near to your hand, my dear Dr. Petrie, is known as the Friend's

Sword. On such occasions as we are discussing, a trusty friend is

given the post--an honoured one--of standing behind the brave man who

offers himself to his gods, and should the latter's courage

momentarily fail him, the friend with the trusty blade (to which now I

especially direct your attention) diverts the hierophant's mind from

his digression, and rectifies his temporary breach of etiquette by

severing the cervical vertebræ of the spinal column with the friendly

blade--which you can reach quite easily, Dr. Petrie, if you care to

extend your hand."

Some dim perception of the truth was beginning to creep into my mind.

When I say a perception of the truth, I mean rather of some part of

the purpose of Dr. Fu-Manchu; of the whole horrible truth, of the

scheme which had been conceived by that mighty, evil man, I had no

glimmering, but I foresaw that a frightful ordeal was before us both.

"That I hold you in high esteem," continued Fu-Manchu, "is a fact

which must be apparent to you by this time, but in regard to your

companion, I entertain very different sentiments...."

Always underlying the deliberate calm of the speaker, sometimes

showing itself in an unusually deep guttural, sometimes in an

unusually serpentine sibilant, lurked the frenzy of hatred which in

the past had revealed itself occasionally in wild outbursts.

Momentarily I expected such an outburst now, but it did not come.

"One quality possessed by Mr. Nayland Smith," resumed the Chinaman, "I

admire; I refer to his courage. I would wish that so courageous a man

should seek his own end, should voluntarily efface himself from the

path of that world-movement which he is powerless to check. In short,

I would have him show himself a \_samurai\_. Always his friend, you

shall remain so to the end, Dr. Petrie. I have arranged for this."

He struck lightly a little silver gong, dependent from the corner of

the table, whereupon, from the curtained doorway, there entered a

short, thickly built Burman whom I recognized for a dacoit. He wore a

shoddy blue suit, which had been made for a much larger man; but these

things claimed little of my attention, which automatically was

directed to the load beneath which the Burman laboured.

Upon his back he carried a sort of wire box rather less than six feet

long, some two feet high, and about two feet wide. In short, it was a

stout framework covered with fine wire-netting on the tops, sides and

ends, but open at the bottom. It seemed to be made in five sections,

or to contain four sliding partitions which could be raised or lowered

at will. These were of wood, and in the bottom of each was cut a

little arch. The arches in the four partitions varied in size, so that

whereas the first was not more than five inches high, the fourth

opened almost to the wire roof of the box or cage; and a fifth, which

was but little higher than the first, was cut in the actual end of the

contrivance.

So intent was I upon this device, the purpose of which I was wholly

unable to divine, that I directed the whole of my attention upon it.

Then, as the Burman paused in the doorway, resting a corner of the

cage upon the brilliant carpet, I glanced toward Dr. Fu-Manchu. He was

watching Nayland Smith, and revealing his irregular yellow teeth--the

teeth of an opium smoker--in the awful mirthless smile which I knew.

"God!" whispered Smith, "the Six Gates!"

"Your knowledge of my beautiful country serves you well," replied

Fu-Manchu gently.

Instantly I looked to my friend ... and every drop of blood seemed to

recede from my heart, leaving it cold in my breast. If \_I\_ did not

know the purpose of the cage, obviously Smith knew it all too well.

His pallor had grown more marked, and although his grey eyes stared

defiantly at the Chinaman, I, who knew him, could read a deathly

horror in their depths.

The dacoit, in obedience to a guttural order from Dr. Fu Manchu,

placed the cage upon the carpet, completely covering Smith's body, but

leaving his neck and head exposed. The seared and pock-marked face set

in a sort of placid leer, the dacoit adjusted the sliding partitions

to Smith's recumbent form, and I saw the purpose of the graduated

arches. They were intended to divide a human body in just such

fashion, and, as I realized, were most cunningly shaped to that end.

The whole of Smith's body lay now in the wire cage, each of the five

compartments whereof was shut off from its neighbour.

The Burman stepped back and stood waiting in the doorway. Dr. Fu

Manchu, removing his gaze from the face of my friend, directed it now

upon me.

"Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith shall have the honour of acting as

hierophant, admitting himself to the Mysteries," said Fu Manchu

softly, "and you, Dr. Petrie, shall be the Friend."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SIX GATES

He glanced toward the Burman, who retired immediately, to re-enter a

moment later carrying a curious leather sack, in shape not unlike that

of a \_sakká\_ or Arab water-carrier. Opening a little trap in the top

of the first compartment of the cage (that is, the compartment which

covered Smith's bare feet and ankles), he inserted the neck of the

sack, then suddenly seized it by the bottom and shook it vigorously.

Before my horrified gaze, four huge rats came tumbling out from the

bag into the cage!

The dacoit snatched away the sack and snapped the shutter fast. A

moving mist obscured my sight, a mist through which I saw the green

eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu fixed upon me, and through which, as from a

great distance, his voice, sunk to a snakelike hiss, came to my ears.

"Cantonese rats, Dr. Petrie ... the most ravenous in the world ...

they have eaten nothing for nearly a week!"

Then all became blurred as though a painter with a brush steeped in

red had smudged out the details of the picture. For an indefinite

period, which seemed like many minutes yet probably was only a few

seconds, I saw nothing and heard nothing; my sensory nerves were

dulled entirely. From this state I was awakened and brought back to

the realities by a sound which ever afterward I was doomed to

associate with that ghastly scene.

This was the squealing of the rats.

The red mist seemed to disperse at that, and with frightfully intense

interest, I began to study the awful torture to which Nayland Smith

was being subjected. The dacoit had disappeared, and Fu-Manchu

placidly was watching the four lean and hideous animals in the cage.

As I also turned my eyes in that direction, the rats overcame their

temporary fear, and began....

"You have been good enough to notice," said the Chinaman, his voice

still sunk in that sibilant whisper, "my partiality for dumb allies.

You have met my scorpions, my death-adders, my baboon-man. The uses of

such a playful little animal as a marmoset have never been fully

appreciated before, I think, but to an indiscretion of this last-named

pet of mine I seem to remember that you owed something in the past,

Dr. Petrie...."

Nayland Smith stifled a deep groan. One rapid glance I ventured at his

face. It was a greyish hue now, and dank with perspiration. His gaze

met mine.

The rats had almost ceased squealing.

"Much depends upon yourself, doctor," continued Fu-Manchu, slightly

raising his voice. "I credit Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith with

courage high enough to sustain the raising of all the gates; but I

estimate the strength of your friendship highly, also, and predict

that you will use the sword of the \_samurai\_ certainly not later than

the time when I shall raise the third gate...."

A low shuddering sound, which I cannot hope to describe, but alas! can

never forget, broke from the lips of the tortured man.

"In China," resumed Fu-Manchu, "we call this quaint fancy the Six

Gates of Joyful Wisdom. The first gate, by which the rats are

admitted, is called the Gate of Joyous Hope; the second, the Gate of

Mirthful Doubt. The third gate is poetically named the Gate of True

Rapture, and the fourth, the Gate of Gentle Sorrow. I once was

honoured in the friendship of an exalted mandarin who sustained the

course of Joyful Wisdom to the raising of the fifth gate (called the

Gate of Sweet Desires) and the admission of the twentieth rat. I

esteem him almost equally with my ancestors. The sixth, or Gate

Celestial--whereby a man enters into the Joy of Complete

Understanding--I have dispensed with, here, substituting a Japanese

fancy of an antiquity nearly as great and honourable. The introduction

of this element of speculation I count a happy thought, and

accordingly take pride to myself."

"The sword, Petrie!" whispered Smith. I should not have recognized his

voice, but he spoke quite evenly and steadily. "I rely upon you, old

man, to spare me the humiliation of asking mercy from that yellow

fiend!"

My mind throughout this time had been gaining a sort of dreadful

clarity. I had avoided looking at the sword of \_kara-kiri\_, but my

thoughts had been leading me mercilessly up to the point at which we

were now arrived. No vestige of anger, of condemnation of the inhuman

being seated in the ebony chair, remained; that was past. Of all that

had gone before, and of what was to come in the future, I thought

nothing, knew nothing. Our long fight against the yellow group, our

encounters with the numberless creatures of Fu Manchu, the

dacoits--even Kâramanèh--were forgotten, blotted out. I saw nothing of

the strange appointments of that subterranean chamber; but face to

face with the supreme moment of a lifetime, I was alone with my poor

friend--and God.

The rats began squealing again. They were fighting....

"Quick, Petrie! Quick, man! I am weakening...."

I turned and took up the \_samurai\_ sword. My hands were very hot and

dry, but perfectly steady, and I tested the edge of the heavy weapon

upon my left thumb-nail as quietly as one might test a razor blade. It

was keen, this blade of ghastly history, as any razor ever wrought in

Sheffield. I seized the graven hilt, bent forward in my chair, and

raised the Friend's Sword high above my head. With the heavy weapon

poised there, I looked into my friend's eyes. They were feverishly

bright, but never in all my days, nor upon the many beds of suffering

which it had been my lot to visit, had I seen an expression like that

within them.

"The raising of the First Gate is always a crucial moment," came the

guttural voice of the Chinaman.

Although I did not see him, and barely heard his words, I was aware

that he had stood up and was bending forward over the lower end of the

cage.

"Now, Petrie! now! God bless you ... and good-bye...."

\* \* \* \* \*

From somewhere--somewhere remote--I heard a hoarse and animal-like

cry, followed by the sound of a heavy fall. I can scarcely bear to

write of that moment, for I had actually begun the downward sweep of

the great sword when that sound came--a faint Hope, speaking of aid

where I had thought no aid possible.

How I contrived to divert the blade, I do not know to this day; but I

do know that its mighty sweep sheared a lock from Smith's head and

laid open the scalp. With the hilt in my quivering hands I saw the

blade bite deeply through the carpet and floor above Nayland Smith's

skull. There, buried fully two inches in the woodwork, it stuck, and

still clutching the hilt, I looked to the right and across the room--I

looked to the curtained doorway.

Fu-Manchu, with one long, claw-like hand upon the top of the first

gate, was bending over the trap, but his brilliant green eyes were

turned in the same direction as my own--upon the curtained doorway.

Upright within it, her beautiful face as pale as death, but her great

eyes blazing with a sort of splendid madness, stood Kâramanèh!

She looked, not at the tortured man, not at me, but fully at Dr.

Fu-Manchu. One hand clutched the trembling draperies; now she suddenly

raised the other, so that the jewels on her white arm glittered in the

light of the lamp above the door. She held my Browning pistol!

Fu-Manchu sprang upright, inhaling sibilantly, as Kâramanèh pointed

the pistol point-blank at his high skull and fired....

I saw a little red streak appear, up by the neutral-coloured hair,

under the black cap. I became as a detached intelligence, unlinked

with the corporeal, looking down upon a thing which for some reason I

had never thought to witness.

Fu-Manchu threw up both arms, so that the sleeves of the green robe

fell back to the elbows. He clutched at his head and the black cap

fell behind him. He began to utter short, guttural cries; he swayed

backward--to the right--to the left--then lurched forward right across

the cage. There he lay, writhing, for a moment, his baneful eyes

turned up, revealing the whites; and the great grey rats, released,

began leaping about the room. Two shot like grey streaks past the slim

figure in the doorway, one darted behind the chair to which I was

lashed, and the fourth ran all around against the wall.... Fu-Manchu,

prostrate across the overturned cage, lay still, his massive head

sagging downward.

I experienced a mental repetition of my adventure in the earlier

evening--I was dropping, dropping, dropping into some bottomless pit ...

warm arms were about my neck; and burning kisses upon my lips.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CALL OF THE EAST

I seemed to haul myself back out of the pit of unconsciousness by the

aid of two little hands which clasped my own. I uttered a sigh that

was almost a sob, and opened my eyes.

I was sitting in the big red-leathern armchair in my own study ... and

a lovely but truly bizarre figure, in a harêm dress, was kneeling on

the carpet at my feet; so that my first sight of the world was the

sweetest sight that the world had to offer me, the dark eyes of

Kâramanèh, with tears trembling like jewels upon her lashes!

I looked no further than that, heeded not if there were others in the

room beside we two, but, gripping the jewel-laden fingers in what must

have been a cruel clasp, I searched the depths of the glorious eyes in

ever-growing wonder. What change had taken place in those limpid,

mysterious pools? Why was a wild madness growing up within me like a

flame? Why was the old longing returned, ten-thousandfold, to snatch

that pliant, exquisite shape to my breast?

No word was spoken, but the spoken words of a thousand ages could not

have expressed one tithe what was held in that silent communion. A

hand was laid hesitatingly on my shoulder. I tore my gaze away from

the lovely face so near to mine, and glanced up.

Azîz stood at the back of my chair!

"God is all merciful," he said. "My sister is restored to us" (I loved

him for the plural) "and she \_remembers\_."

Those few words were enough; I understood now that this lovely girl,

who half knelt, half lay at my feet, was not the evil, perverted

creature of Fu-Manchu whom we had gone out to arrest with the other

vile servants of the Chinese doctor, but was the old, beloved

companion of two years ago, the Kâramanèh for whom I had sought long

and wearily in Egypt, who had been swallowed up and lost to me in that

land of mystery.

The loss of memory which Fu-Manchu had artificially induced was

subject to the same inexplicable laws which ordinarily rule in cases

of \_amnesia\_. The shock of her brave action that night had begun to

effect a cure; the sight of Azîz had completed it.

Inspector Weymouth was standing by the writing-table. My mind cleared

rapidly now, and standing up, but without releasing the girl's hands,

so that I drew her up beside me, I said:

"Weymouth--where is--?

"He's waiting to see you, doctor," replied the Inspector.

A pang, almost physical, struck at my heart.

"Poor, dear old Smith!" I cried, with a break in my voice.

Dr. Gray, a neighbouring practitioner, appeared in the doorway at the

moment that I spoke the words.

"It's all right, Petrie," he said, reassuringly; "I think we took it

in time. I have thoroughly cauterised the wounds, and granted that no

complication sets in, he'll be on his feet again in a week or two."

I suppose I was in a condition closely bordering upon the hysterical.

At any rate, my behaviour was extraordinary. I raised both my hands

above my head.

"Thank God!" I cried at the top of my voice, "thank God!--thank God!"

"Thank Him, indeed," responded the musical voice of Azîz. He spoke

with all the passionate devoutness of the true Moslem.

Everything, even Kâramanèh, was forgotten, and I started for the door

as though my life depended upon my speed. With one foot upon the

landing, I turned, looked back, and met the glance of Inspector

Weymouth.

"What have you done with the--body?" I asked.

"We haven't been able to get to it. That end of the vault collapsed

two minutes after we hauled you out!"

\* \* \* \* \*

As I write, now, of these strange days, already they seem remote and

unreal. But, where other and more dreadful memories already are grown

misty, the memory of that evening in my rooms remains clear-cut and

intimate. It marked a crisis in my life.

During the days that immediately followed, whilst Smith was slowly

recovering from his hurts, I made my plans, deliberately; I prepared

to cut myself off from old associations--prepared to exile myself,

gladly; how gladly I cannot hope to express in mere cold words.

That my friend approved of my projects I cannot truthfully state, but

his disapproval at least was not openly expressed. To Kâramanèh I said

nothing of my plans, but her complete reliance in my powers to protect

her, now, from all harm, was at once pathetic and exquisite.

Since, always, I have sought in these chronicles, to confine myself to

the facts directly relating to the malignant activity of Dr.

Fu-Manchu, I shall abstain from burdening you with details of my

private affairs. As an instrument of the Chinese doctor, it has

sometimes been my duty to write of the beautiful Eastern girl; I

cannot suppose that my readers have any further curiosity respecting

her from the moment that Fate freed her from that awful servitude.

Therefore, when I shall have dealt with the episodes which marked our

voyage to Egypt--I had opened negotiations in regard to a practice in

Cairo--I may honourably lay down my pen.

These episodes opened, dramatically upon the second night of the

voyage from Marseilles.

CHAPTER XXXI

"MY SHADOW LIES UPON YOU"

I suppose I did not awake very readily. Following the nervous

vigilance of the past six months, my tired nerves, in the enjoyment of

this relaxation, were rapidly recuperating. I no longer feared to

awaken to find a knife at my throat, no longer dreaded the darkness as

a foe.

So that the voice may have been calling (indeed, \_had\_ been calling)

for some time, and of this I had been hazily conscious before finally

I awoke. Then, ere the new sense of security came to reassure me, the

old sense of impending harm set my heart leaping nervously. There is

always a certain physical panic attendant upon such awakenings in the

still of night, especially in novel surroundings. Now I sat up

abruptly, clutching at the rail of my berth and listening.

There was a soft thudding on my cabin door, and a voice, low and

urgent, was crying my name.

Through the port-hole the moonlight streamed into my room, and save

for a remote and soothing throb, inseparable from the progress of a

great steamship, nothing else disturbed the stillness; I might have

floated lonely upon the bosom of the Mediterranean. But there was the

drumming on the door again, and the urgent appeal:

"Dr. Petrie! Dr. Petrie!"

I threw off the bedclothes and stepped on to the floor of the cabin,

fumbling hastily for my slippers. A fear that something was amiss,

that some aftermath, some wraith of the dread Chinaman, was yet to

come to disturb our premature peace, began to haunt me. I threw open

the door.

Upon the gleaming deck, blackly outlined against a wondrous sky,

stood a man who wore a blue greatcoat over his pyjamas, and whose

unstockinged feet were thrust into red slippers. It was Platts, the

Marconi operator.

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, Dr. Petrie," he said, "and I was

even less anxious to arouse your neighbour; but somebody seems to be

trying to get a message, presumably urgent, through to you."

"To me!" I cried.

"I cannot make it out," admitted Platts, running his fingers through

dishevelled hair, "but I thought it better to arouse you. Will you

come up?"

I turned without a word, slipped into my dressing-gown, and with

Platts passed aft along the deserted deck. The sea was as calm as a

great lake. Ahead, on the port bow, an angry flambeau burnt redly

beneath the peaceful vault of the heavens. Platts nodded absently in

the direction of the weird flames.

"Stromboli," he said; "we shall be nearly through the Straits by

breakfast-time."

We mounted the narrow stair to the Marconi deck. At the table sat

Platts' assistant with the Marconi attachment upon his head--an

apparatus which always set me thinking of the electric chair.

"Have you got it?" demanded my companion as we entered the room.

"It's still coming through," replied the other without moving, "but in

the same jerky fashion. Every time I get it, it seems to have gone

back to the beginning--just \_Dr. Petrie\_--\_Dr. Petrie\_."

He began to listen again for the elusive message. I turned to Platts.

"Where is it being sent from?" I asked.

Platts shook his head.

"That's the mystery," he declared. "Look!"--he pointed to the table;

"according to the Marconi chart, there's a Messageries boat due west

between us and Marseilles, and the homeward-bound P. & O. which we

passed this morning must be getting on that way also, by now. The

\_Isis\_ is somewhere ahead, but I've spoken all these, and the message

comes from none of them."

"Then it may come from Messina."

"It doesn't come from Messina," replied the man at the table,

beginning to write rapidly.

Platts stepped forward and bent over the message which the other was

writing.

"Here it is!" he cried excitedly; "we're getting it."

Stepping in turn to the table, I leant over between the two and read

these words as the operator wrote them down: \_Dr. Petrie\_--\_my

shadow\_....

I drew a quick breath and gripped Platt's shoulder harshly. His

assistant began fingering the instrument with irritation.

"Lost it again!" he muttered.

"This message...." I began.

But again the pencil was travelling over the paper:--\_lies upon you

all\_ ... \_end of message\_.

The operator stood up and unclasped the receivers from his ears.

There, high above the sleeping ship's company, with the blue carpet of

the Mediterranean stretched indefinitely about us, we three stood

looking at one another. By virtue of a miracle of modern science, some

one, divided from me by mile upon mile of boundless ocean, had

spoken--and had been heard.

"Is there no means of learning," I said, "from whence this message

emanated?"

Platts shook his head, perplexedly.

"They gave no code word," he said. "God knows who they were. It's a

strange business and a strange message. Have you any sort of idea, Dr.

Petrie, respecting the identity of the sender?"

I stared him hard in the face; an idea had mechanically entered my

mind, but one of which I did not choose to speak, since it was opposed

to human possibility.

But had I not seen with my own eyes the bloody streak across his

forehead as the shot fired by Kâramanèh entered his high skull, had I

not known, so certainly as it is given to men to know, that the giant

intellect was no more, the mighty will impotent, I should have

replied:

"The message is from Dr. Fu Manchu!"

My reflections were rudely terminated and my sinister thoughts given

new stimulus, by a loud though muffled cry which reached me from

somewhere in the ship below. Both my companions started as violently

as I, whereby I knew that the mystery of the wireless message had not

been without its effect upon their minds also. But whereas they paused

in doubt, I leapt from the room and almost threw myself down the

ladder.

It was Kâramanèh who had uttered that cry of fear and horror!

Although I could perceive no connection betwixt the strange message

and the cry in the night, intuitively I linked them, intuitively I

knew that my fears had been well grounded; that the shadow of Fu

Manchu still lay upon us.

Kâramanèh occupied a large stateroom aft on the main deck; so that I

had to descend from the upper deck on which my own room was situated

to the promenade deck, again to the main deck, and thence proceed

nearly the whole length of the alleyway.

Kâramanèh and her brother, Azîz, who occupied a neighbouring room, met

me, near the library. Kâramanèh's eyes were wide with fear; her

peerless colouring had fled, and she was white to the lips. Azîz, who

wore a dressing-gown thrown hastily over his night attire, had his arm

protectively about the girl's shoulders.

"The mummy!" she whispered tremulously, "the mummy!"

There came a sound of opening doors, and several passengers, whom

Kâramanèh's cries had alarmed, appeared in various stages of undress.

A stewardess came running from the far end of the alleyway, and I

found time to wonder at my own speed; for, starting from the distant

Marconi deck, yet I had been the first to arrive upon the scene.

Stacey, the ship's doctor, was quartered at no great distance from the

spot, and he now joined the group. Anticipating the question which

trembled upon the lips of several of those about me--

"Come to Dr. Stacey's room," I said, taking Kâramanèh's arm; "we will

give you something to enable you to sleep." I turned to the group. "My

patient has had severe nerve trouble," I explained, "and has developed

somnambulistic tendencies."

I declined the stewardess's offer of assistance, with a slight shake

of the head, and shortly the four of us entered the doctor's cabin, on

the deck above. Stacey carefully closed the door. He was an old

fellow-student of mine, and already he knew much of the history of the

beautiful Eastern girl and her brother Azîz.

"I fear there's mischief afoot, Petrie," he said. "Thanks to your

presence of mind, the ship's gossips need know nothing of it."

I glanced at Kâramanèh, who, since the moment of my arrival, had never

once removed her gaze from me; she remained in that state of passive

fear in which I had found her, the lovely face pallid; and she stared

at me fixedly in a childish, expressionless way which made me dread

that the shock to which she had been subjected, whatever its nature,

had caused a relapse into that strange condition of forgetfulness from

which a previous shock had aroused her. I could see that Stacey shared

my view, for--

"Something has frightened you," he said gently, seating himself on the

arm of Kâramanèh's chair and patting her hand as if to reassure her.

"Tell us all about it."

For the first time since our meeting that night, the girl turned her

eyes from me and glanced up at Stacey, a sudden warm blush stealing

over her face and throat and as quickly departing, to leave her even

more pale than before. She grasped Stacey's hand in both her own--and

looked again at me.

"Send for Mr. Nayland Smith without delay!" she said, and her sweet

voice was slightly tremulous. "He must be put on his guard!"

I started up.

"Why?" I said. "For God's sake tell us what has happened!"

Azîz, who evidently was as anxious as myself for information, and who

now knelt at his sister's feet looking up at her with that strange

love, which was almost adoration, in his eyes, glanced back at me and

nodded his head rapidly.

"Something "--Kâramanèh paused, shuddering violently--"some dreadful

thing, like a mummy escaped from its tomb, came into my room to-night

through the port-hole...."

"Through the port-hole?" echoed Dr. Stacey amazedly.

"Yes, yes, through the port-hole! A creature tall and very, very thin.

He wore wrappings--yellow wrappings, swathed about his head, so that

only his eyes, his evil gleaming eyes, were visible.... From waist to

knees he was covered, also, but his body, his feet, and his legs were

bare...."

"Was he--?" I began.

"He was a brown man, yes." Kâramanèh, divining my question, nodded,

and the shimmering cloud of her wonderful hair, hastily confined,

burst free and rippled about her shoulders. "A gaunt, fleshless brown

man, who bent, and writhed bony fingers--so!"

"A thug!" I cried.

"He--it--the mummy thing--would have strangled me if I had slept, for

he crouched over the berth--seeking--seeking...."

I clenched my teeth convulsively.

"But I was sitting up--"

"With the light on?" interrupted Stacey in surprise.

"No," added Kâramanèh; "the light was out." She turned her eyes toward

me, as the wonderful blush overspread her face once more. "I was

sitting thinking. It all happened within a few seconds, and quite

silently. As the mummy crouched over the berth, I unlocked the door

and leapt out into the passage. I think I screamed; I did not mean to.

Oh, Dr. Stacey, there is not a moment to spare! Mr. Nayland Smith must

be warned immediately. Some horrible servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu is on

the ship!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE TRAGEDY

Nayland Smith leant against the edge of the dressing-table, attired in

pyjamas. The little stateroom was hazy with smoke, and my friend

gripped the charred briar between his teeth and watched the blue-grey

clouds arising from the bowl, in an abstracted way. I knew that he was

thinking hard, and from the fact that he had exhibited no surprise

when I had related to him the particulars of the attack upon

Kâramanèh, I judged that he had half anticipated something of the

kind. Suddenly he stood up, staring at me fixedly.

"Your tact has saved the situation, Petrie," he snapped. "It failed

you momentarily, though, when you proposed to me just now that we

should muster the lascars for inspection. Our game is to pretend that

we know nothing--that we believe Kâramanèh to have had a bad dream."

"But, Smith--" I began.

"It would be useless, Petrie," he interrupted me. "You cannot suppose

that I overlooked the possibility of some creature of the Doctor's

being among the lascars. I can assure you that not one of them answers

to the description of the midnight assailant. From the girl's account

we have to look (discarding the idea of a revivified mummy) for a man

of unusual height--and there's no lascar of unusual height on board;

and from the visible evidence, that he entered the stateroom through

the port-hole, we have to look for a man more than normally thin. In a

word, the servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu who attempted the life of Kâramanèh

is either in hiding in the ship, or if visible, is disguised."

With his usual clarity, Nayland Smith had visualized the facts of the

case; I passed in mental survey each one of the passengers, and those

of the crew whose appearances were familiar to me, with the result

that I had to admit the justice of my friend's conclusions. Smith

began to pace the narrow strip of carpet between the dressing-table

and the door. Suddenly he began again.

"From our knowledge of Fu-Manchu--and of the group surrounding him

(and, don't forget, \_surviving\_ him)--we may further assume that the

wireless message was no gratuitous piece of melodrama, but that it was

directed to a definite end. Let us endeavour to link up the chain a

little. You occupy an upper-berth; so do I. Experience of the Chinaman

has formed a habit in both of us: that of sleeping with closed

windows. Your port was fastened and so was my own. Kâramanèh is

quartered on the main deck, and her brother's stateroom opens into the

same alleyway. Since the ship is in the Straits of Messina, and the

glass set fair, the stewards have not closed the port-holes nightly

at present. We know that that of Kâramanèh's stateroom was open.

Therefore, in any attempt upon our quarter, Kâramanèh would

automatically be selected for the victim, since failing you or myself

she may be regarded as being the most obnoxious to Dr. Fu-Manchu."

I nodded comprehendingly. Smith's capacity for throwing the white

light of reason into the darkest places often amazed me.

"You may have noticed," he continued, "that Kâramanèh's room is

directly below your own. In the event of any outcry, you would be

sooner upon the scene than I should, for instance, because I sleep on

the opposite side of the ship. This circumstance I take to be the

explanation of the wireless message, which, because of its hesitancy

(a piece of ingenuity very characteristic of the group), led to your

being awakened and invited up to the Marconi deck; in short, it gave

the would-be assassin a better chance of escaping before your

arrival."

I watched my friend in growing wonder. The strange events, seemingly

having no link, took their place in the drama, and became well-ordered

episodes in a plot that only a criminal genius could have devised. As

I studied the keen, bronzed face, I realized to the full the

stupendous mental power of Dr. Fu-Manchu, measuring it by the

criterion of Nayland Smith's. For the cunning Chinaman, in a sense,

had foiled this brilliant man before me, whereby if by naught else I

might know him a master of his evil art.

"I regard the episode," continued Smith, "as a posthumous attempt of

the Doctor's; a legacy of hate which may prove more disastrous than

any attempt made upon us by Fu-Manchu in life. Some fiendish member of

the murder group is on board the ship. We must, as always, meet guile

with guile. There must be no appeal to the Captain, no public

examination of passengers and crew. One attempt has failed; I do not

doubt that others will be made. At present, you will enact the rôle of

physician-in-attendance upon Kâramanèh, and will put it about for whom

it may interest that a slight return of her nervous trouble is causing

her to pass uneasy nights. I can safely leave this part of the case to

you, I think?"

I nodded rapidly.

"I haven't troubled to make inquiries," added Smith, "but I think it

probable that the regulation respecting closed ports will come into

operation immediately we have passed the Straits, or at any rate

immediately there is any likelihood of bad weather."

"You mean--"

"I mean that no alteration should be made in our habits. A second

attempt along similar lines is to be apprehended--to-night. After that

we may begin to look out for a new danger."

"I pray we may avoid it," I said fervently.

As I entered the saloon for breakfast in the morning, I was subjected

to solicitous inquiries from Mrs. Prior, the gossip of the ship. Her

room adjoined Kâramanèh's, and she had been one of the passengers

aroused by the girl's cries in the night. Strictly adhering to my

rôle, I explained that my patient was threatened with a second nervous

breakdown, and was subject to vivid and disturbing dreams. One or two

other inquiries I met in the same way, ere escaping to the corner

table reserved to us.

That iron-bound code of conduct which rules the Anglo-Indian, in the

first days of the voyage had threatened to ostracise Kâramanèh and

Azîz, by reason of the Eastern blood to which their brilliant but

peculiar type of beauty bore witness. Smith's attitude, however--and,

in a Burmese Commissioner, it constituted something of a law--had done

much to break down the barriers; the extraordinary beauty of the girl

had done the rest. So that now, far from finding themselves shunned,

the society of Kâramanèh and her romantic-looking brother was

universally courted. The last inquiry that morning, respecting my

interesting patient, came from the Bishop of Damascus, a benevolent

old gentleman whose ancestry was not wholly innocent of Oriental

strains, and who sat at a table immediately behind me. As I settled

down to my porridge, he turned his chair slightly and bent to my ear.

"Mrs. Prior tells me that your charming friend was disturbed last

night," he whispered. "She seems rather pale this morning; I sincerely

trust that she is suffering no ill effect."

I swung around, with a smile. Owing to my carelessness, there was a

slight collision, and the poor bishop, who had been invalided to

England after typhoid, in order to undergo special treatment,

suppressed an exclamation of pain, although his fine dark eyes gleamed

kindly upon me through the pebbles of his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Indeed, despite his Eastern blood, he might have posed for a Sadler

picture, his small and refined features seeming out of place above the

bulky body.

"Can you forgive my clumsiness?" I began.

But the bishop raised his small, slim-fingered hand of old-ivory hue

deprecatingly.

His system was supercharged with typhoid bacilli, and, as sometimes

occurs, the superfluous "bugs" had sought exit. He could only walk

with the aid of two stout sticks, and bent very much at that. His left

leg had been surgically scraped to the bone, and I appreciated the

exquisite torture to which my awkwardness had subjected him. But he

would entertain no apologies, pressing his inquiry respecting

Kâramanèh, in the kindly manner which had made him so deservedly

popular on board.

"Many thanks for your solicitude," I said; "I have promised her sound

repose to-night, and since my professional reputation is at stake, I

shall see that she secures it."

In short, we were in pleasant company, and the day passed happily

enough and without notable event. Smith spent some considerable time

with the chief officer, wandering about unfrequented parts of the

ship. I learnt later that he had explored the lascars' quarters, the

forecastle, the engine-room, and had even descended to the stoke-hold;

but this was done so unostentatiously that it occasioned no comment.

With the approach of evening, in place of that physical contentment

which usually heralds the dinner-hour, at sea, I experienced a fit of

the seemingly causeless apprehension which too often in the past had

harbingered the coming of grim events; which I had learnt to associate

with the nearing presence of one of Fu-Manchu's death-agents. In view

of the facts, as I afterwards knew them to be, I cannot account for

this.

Yet, in an unexpected manner, my forebodings were realized. That night

I was destined to meet a sorrow surpassing any which my troubled life

had known. Even now I experience great difficulty in relating the

matters which befell, in speaking of the sense of irrevocable loss

which came to me. Briefly, then, at about ten minutes before the

dining hour, whilst all the passengers, myself included, were below,

dressing, a faint cry arose from somewhere aft on the upper deck--a

cry which was swiftly taken up by other voices, so that presently a

deck-steward echoed it immediately outside my own stateroom:

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

All my premonitions rallying in that one sickening moment, I sprang

out on the deck, half dressed as I was, and leaping past the boat

which swung nearly opposite my door, craned over the rail, looking

astern.

For a long time I could detect nothing unusual. The engine-room

telegraph was ringing--and the motion of the screws momentarily

ceased; then, in response to further ringing, recommenced, but so as

to jar the whole structure of the vessel; whereby I knew that the

engines were reversed. Peering intently into the wake of the ship, I

was but dimly aware of the ever-growing turmoil around me, of the

swift mustering of a boat's crew, of the shouted orders of the third

officer. Suddenly I saw it--the sight which was to haunt me for

succeeding days and nights.

Half in the streak of the wake and half out of it, I perceived the

sleeve of a white jacket, and, near to it, a soft felt hat. The sleeve

rose up once into clear view, seemed to describe a half-circle in the

air, then sank back again into the glassy swell of the water. Only the

hat remained floating upon the surface.

By the evidence of the white sleeve alone I might have remained

unconvinced, although upon the voyage I had become familiar enough

with the drill shooting-jacket, but the presence of the grey felt hat

was almost conclusive.

The man overboard was Nayland Smith!

I cannot hope, writing now, to convey in any words at my command, a

sense, even remote, of the utter loneliness which in that dreadful

moment closed coldly down upon me.

To spring overboard to the rescue was a natural impulse, but to have

obeyed it would have been worse than quixotic. In the first place, the

drowning man was close upon half a mile astern; in the second place,

others had seen the hat and the white coat as clearly as I; among them

the third officer, standing upright in the stern of the boat--which,

with commendable promptitude, had already been swung into the water.

The steamer was being put about, describing a wide arc around the

little boat dancing on the deep blue rollers....

Of the next hour, I cannot bear to write at all. Long as I had known

him, I was ignorant of my friend's powers as a swimmer, but I judged

that he must have been a poor one from the fact that he had sunk so

rapidly in a calm sea. Except the hat, no trace of Nayland Smith

remained when the boat got to the spot.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MUMMY

Dinner was out of the question that night for all of us. Kâramanèh,

who had spoken no word, but, grasping my hands, had looked into my

eyes--her own glassy with unshed tears--and then stolen away to her

cabin, had not since reappeared. Seated upon my berth, I stared

unseeingly before me, upon a changed ship, a changed sea and sky--upon

another world. The poor old Bishop, my neighbour, had glanced in

several times, as he hobbled by, and his spectacles were unmistakably

humid; but even he had vouchsafed no word, realizing that my sorrow

was too deep for such consolation.

When at last I became capable of connected thought, I found myself

faced by a big problem. Should I place the facts of the matter, as I

knew them to be, before the Captain? or could I hope to apprehend

Fu-Manchu's servant by the methods suggested by my poor friend? That

Smith's death was an accident, I did not believe for a moment; it was

impossible not to link it with the attempt upon Kâramanèh. In my

misery and doubt, I determined to take counsel with Dr. Stacey. I

stood up, and passed out on to the deck.

Those passengers whom I met on my way to his room regarded me in

respectful silence. By contrast, Stacey's attitude surprised and even

annoyed me.

"I'd be prepared to stake all I possess--although it's not much," he

said, "that this was not the work of your hidden enemy."

He blankly refused to give me his reasons for the statement and

strongly advised me to watch and wait but to make no communication to

the Captain.

At this hour I can look back and savour again something of the

profound dejection of that time. I could not face the passengers; I

even avoided Kâramanèh and Azîz. I shut myself in my cabin and sat

staring aimlessly into the growing darkness. The steward knocked,

once, inquiring if I needed anything, but I dismissed him abruptly. So

I passed the evening and the greater part of the night.

Those groups of promenaders who passed my door invariably were

discussing my poor friend's tragic end; but as the night wore on, the

deck grew empty, and I sat amid a silence that in my miserable state I

welcomed more than the presence of any friend, saving only the one

whom I should never welcome again.

Since I had not counted the bells, to this day I have only the vaguest

idea respecting the time whereat the next incident occurred which it

is my duty to chronicle. Perhaps I was on the verge of falling asleep,

seated there as I was; at any rate, I could scarcely believe myself

awake, when, unheralded by any footsteps to indicate his coming, some

one who seemed to be crouching outside my stateroom, slightly raised

himself and peered in through the port-hole--which I had not troubled

to close.

He must have been a fairly tall man to have looked in at all, and

although his features were indistinguishable in the darkness, his

outline, which was clearly perceptible against the white boat beyond,

was unfamiliar to me. He seemed to have a small and oddly swathed

head, and what I could make out of the gaunt neck and square shoulders

in some way suggested an unnatural thinness; in short, the smudgy

silhouette in the port-hole was weirdly like that of a \_mummy\_!

For some moments I stared at the apparition; then, rousing myself from

the apathy into which I had sunk, I stood up very quickly and stepped

across the room. As I did so the figure vanished, and when I threw

open the door and looked out upon the deck ... the deck was wholly

untenanted!

I realized at once that it would be useless, even had I chosen the

course, to seek confirmation of what I had seen from the officer on

the bridge: my own cabin, together with the one adjoining--that of the

Bishop--was not visible from the bridge.

For some time I stood in my doorway, wondering in a disinterested

fashion which now I cannot explain, if the hidden enemy had revealed

himself to me, or if disordered imagination had played me a trick.

Later, I was destined to know the truth of the matter, but when at

last I fell into a troubled sleep, that night, I was still in some

doubt upon the point.

My state of mind when I awakened on the following day was

indescribable; I found it difficult to doubt that Nayland Smith would

meet me on the way to the bath-room as usual, with the cracked briar

fuming between his teeth. I felt myself almost compelled to pass

around to his stateroom in order to convince myself that he was not

really there. The catastrophe was still unreal to me, and the world a

dream-world. Indeed, I retain scarcely any recollections of the

traffic of that day, or of the days that followed it until we reached

Port Said.

Two things only made any striking appeal to my dulled intelligence at

that time. These were: the aloof attitude of Dr. Stacey, who seemed

carefully to avoid me; and a curious circumstance which the second

officer mentioned in conversation one evening as we strolled up and

down the main deck together.

"Either I was fast asleep at my post, Dr. Petrie," he said, "or last

night, in the middle watch, someone or something came over the side of

the ship just aft the bridge, slipped across the deck, and

disappeared."

I stared at him wonderingly.

"Do you mean something that came up out of the sea?" I said.

"Nothing could very well have come up out of the sea," he replied,

smiling slightly, "so that it must have come up from the deck below."

"Was it a man?"

"It looked like a man, and a fairly tall one, but he came and was gone

like a fish, and I saw no more of him up to the time I was relieved.

To tell you the truth, I did not report it because I thought I must

have been dozing; it's a dead slow watch, and the navigation on this

part of the run is child's play."

I was on the point of telling him what I had seen myself, two evenings

before, but for some reason I refrained from doing so, although I

think, had I confided in him, he would have abandoned the idea that

what he had seen was phantasmal; for the pair of us could not very

well have been dreaming. Some malignant presence haunted the ship; I

could not doubt this; yet I remained passive, sunk in a lethargy of

sorrow.

We were scheduled to reach Port Said at about eight o'clock in the

evening, but by reason of the delay occasioned so tragically, I learnt

that in all probability we should not arrive earlier than midnight,

whilst passengers would not go ashore until the following morning.

Kâramanèh, who had been staring ahead all day, seeking a first glimpse

of her native land, was determined to remain up until the hour of our

arrival, but after dinner a notice was posted up stating that we

should not be in before two a.m. Even those passengers who were the

most enthusiastic thereupon determined to postpone, for a few hours,

their first glimpse of the land of the Pharaohs and even to forgo the

sight--one of the strangest and most interesting in the world--of Port

Said by night.

For my own part, I confess that all the interest and hope with which I

had looked forward to our arrival had left me, and often I detected

tears in the eyes of Kâramanèh; whereby I knew that the coldness in my

heart had manifested itself even to her. I had sustained the greatest

blow of my life, and not even the presence of so lovely a companion

could entirely recompense me for the loss of my dearest friend.

The lights on the Egyptian shore were faintly visible when the last

group of stragglers on deck broke up. I had long since prevailed upon

Kâramanèh to retire, and now, utterly sick at heart, I sought my own

stateroom, mechanically undressed, and turned in.

It may, or may not be singular that I had neglected all precautions

since the night of the tragedy; I was not even conscious of a desire

to visit retribution upon our hidden enemy; in some strange fashion I

took it for granted that there would be no further attempts upon

Kâramanèh, Azîz, or myself. I had not troubled to confirm Smith's

surmise respecting the closing of the port-holes; but I know now for a

fact that, whereas they had been closed from the time of our leaving

the Straits of Messina, to-night, in sight of the Egyptian coasts, the

regulation was relaxed again. I cannot say if this is usual, but that

it occurred on this ship is a fact to which I can testify--a fact to

which my attention was to be drawn dramatically.

The night was steamingly hot, and because I welcomed the circumstance

that my own port was widely opened, I reflected that those on the

lower decks might be open also. A faint sense of danger stirred within

me; indeed, I sat upright and was about to spring out of my berth when

that occurred which induced me to change my mind.

All passengers had long since retired, and a midnight silence

descended upon the ship, for we were not yet close enough to port for

any unusual activities to have commenced.

Clearly outlined in the open port-hole there suddenly arose that same

grotesque silhouette which I had seen once before.

Prompted by I know not what, I lay still and simulated heavy

breathing; for it was evident to me that I must be partly visible to

the watcher, so bright was the night. For ten--twenty--thirty seconds

he studied me in absolute silence, that gaunt thing so like a mummy;

and, my eyes partly closed, I watched him, breathing heavily all the

time. Then making no more noise than a cat, he moved away across the

deck, and I could judge of his height by the fact that his small

swathed head remained visible almost to the time that he passed to the

end of the white boat which swung opposite my stateroom.

In a moment I slipped quietly to the floor, crossed and peered out of

the port-hole; so that at last I had a clear view of the sinister

mummy-man. He was crouching under the bow of the boat, and attaching

to the white rails, below, a contrivance of a kind with which I was

not entirely unfamiliar. This was a thin ladder of silken rope, having

bamboo rungs, with two metal hooks for attaching it to any suitable

object.

The one thus engaged was, as Kâramanèh had declared, almost

superhumanly thin. His loins were swathed in a sort of linen garment,

and his head so bound about, turban fashion, that only his gleaming

eyes remained visible. The bare limbs and body were of a dusky yellow

colour, and, at sight of him, I experienced a sudden nausea.

My pistol was in my cabin-trunk, and to have found it in the dark,

without making a good deal of noise, would have been impossible.

Doubting how I should act, I stood watching the man with the swathed

head whilst he threw the end of the ladder over the side, crept past

the bow of the boat, and swung his gaunt body over the rail,

exhibiting the agility of an ape. One quick glance fore and aft he

gave, then began to swarm down the ladder; in which instant I knew his

mission.

With a choking cry, which forced itself unwilled from my lips, I tore

at the door, threw it open, and sprang across the deck. Plans, I had

none, and since I carried no instrument wherewith to sever the ladder,

the murderer might indeed have carried out his design for all that I

could have done to prevent him, were it not that another took a hand

in the game....

At the moment that the mummy-man--his head now on a level with the

deck--perceived me, he stopped dead. Coincident with his stopping, the

crack of a pistol sounded--from immediately beyond the boat.

Uttering a sort of sobbing sound, the creature fell--then clutched,

with straining yellow fingers, at the rails, and, seemingly by dint of

a great effort, swarmed along aft some twenty feet, with incredible

swiftness and agility, and clambered on to the deck.

A second shot cracked sharply; and a voice (God, was I mad?) cried:

"Hold him, Petrie!"

Rigid with fearful astonishment I stood, as out from the boat above me

leapt a figure attired solely in shirt and trousers. The new-comer

leapt away in the wake of the mummy-man--who had vanished around the

corner by the smokeroom. Over his shoulder he cried back at me:

"The Bishop's stateroom! See that no one enters!"

I clutched at my head--which seemed to be fiery hot; I realized, in my

own person, the sensations of one who knows himself mad.

For the man who pursued the mummy was \_Nayland Smith\_!

\* \* \* \* \*

I stood in the Bishop's stateroom, Nayland Smith, his gaunt face wet

with perspiration, beside me, handling certain odd-looking objects

which littered the place, and lay about amid the discarded garments of

the absent cleric.

"Pneumatic pads!" he snapped. "The man was a walking air-cushion!" He

gingerly fingered two strange rubber appliances. "For distending the

cheeks," he muttered, dropping them disgustedly on the floor. "His

hands and wrists betrayed him, Petrie. He wore his cuffs unusually

long but could not entirely hide his bony wrists. To have watched him,

whilst remaining myself unseen, was next to impossible; hence my

device of tossing a dummy overboard, calculated to float for less than

ten minutes! It actually floated nearly fifteen, as a matter of fact,

and I had some horrible moments!"

"Smith!" I said, "how could you submit me ...?"

He clapped his hands on my shoulders.

"My dear old chap--there was no other way, believe me. From that boat

I could see right into his stateroom, but, once in, I dare not leave

it--except late at night, stealthily! The second spotted me one night

and I thought the game was up, but evidently he didn't report it."

"But you might have confided...."

"Impossible! I'll admit I nearly fell to the temptation that first

night; for I could see into your room as well as into his!" He slapped

me boisterously on the back, but his grey eyes were suspiciously

moist. "Dear old Petrie! Thank God for our friends! But you'd be the

first to admit, old man, that you're a dead poor actor! Your portrayal

of grief for the loss of a valued chum would not have convinced a soul

on board!

"Therefore I made use of Stacey, whose callous attitude was less

remarkable. Gad, Petrie! I nearly bagged our man the first night! The

elaborate plan--Marconi message to get you out of the way, and so

forth--had miscarried, and he knew the port-hole trick would be

useless once we got into the open sea. He took a big chance. He

discarded his clerical guise and peeped into your room--you

remember?--but you were awake, and I made no move when he slipped back

to his own cabin; I wanted to take him red-handed."

"Have you any idea ...?"

"Who he is? No more than \_where\_ he is! Probably some creature of Dr.

Fu-Manchu specially chosen for the purpose; obviously a man of

culture, and probably of thug ancestry. I hit him--in the shoulder;

but even then he ran like a hare. We've searched the ship, without

result. He may have gone overboard and chanced the swim to shore...."

We stepped out on to the deck. Around us was that unforgettable

scene--Port Said by night. The ship was barely moving through the

glassy water, now. Smith took my arm and we walked forward. Above us

was the mighty peace of Egypt's sky ablaze with splendour; around and

about us moved the unique turmoil of the clearing-house of the Near

East.

"I would give much to know the real identity of the Bishop of

Damascus," muttered Smith.

He stopped abruptly, snapping his teeth together and grasping my arm

as in a vice. Hard upon his words had followed the rattling clangour

as the great anchor was let go; but horribly intermingled with the

metallic roar there came to us such a fearful inarticulate shrieking

as to chill one's heart.

The anchor plunged into the water of the harbour; the shrieking

ceased. Smith turned to me, and his face was tragic in the light of

the arc lamp swung hard by.

"We shall never know," he whispered. "God forgive him--he must be in

bloody tatters now. Petrie, the poor fool was hiding in the

\_chain-locker!\_"

A little hand stole into mine. I turned quickly. Kâramanèh stood

beside me. I placed my arm about her shoulders, drawing her close; and

I blush to relate that all else was forgotten.

For a moment, heedless of the fearful turmoil forward, Nayland Smith

stood looking at us. Then he turned, with his rare smile, and walked

aft.

"Perhaps you're right, Petrie!" he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

Uniform with this Volume

36 De Profundis Oscar Wilde

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