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Being a New Phase in the Activities of Fu-Manchu, the Devil Doctor

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THE HAND OF FU-MANCHU

Being a New Phase in the Activities of Fu-Manchu, the Devil Doctor

by

SAX ROHMER

THE HAND OF FU MANCHU

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELER FROM TIBET

"Who's there?" I called sharply.

I turned and looked across the room. The window had been widely opened

when I entered, and a faint fog haze hung in the apartment, seeming to

veil the light of the shaded lamp. I watched the closed door intently,

expecting every moment to see the knob turn. But nothing happened.

"Who's there?" I cried again, and, crossing the room, I threw open the

door.

The long corridor without, lighted only by one inhospitable lamp at a

remote end, showed choked and yellowed with this same fog so

characteristic of London in November. But nothing moved to right nor

left of me. The New Louvre Hotel was in some respects yet incomplete,

and the long passage in which I stood, despite its marble facings, had

no air of comfort or good cheer; palatial it was, but inhospitable.

I returned to the room, reclosing the door behind me, then for some

five minutes or more I stood listening for a repetition of that

mysterious sound, as of something that both dragged and tapped, which

already had arrested my attention. My vigilance went unrewarded. I

had closed the window to exclude the yellow mist, but subconsciously I

was aware of its encircling presence, walling me in, and now I found

myself in such a silence as I had known in deserts but could scarce

have deemed possible in fog-bound London, in the heart of the world's

metropolis, with the traffic of the Strand below me upon one side and

the restless life of the river upon the other.

It was easy to conclude that I had been mistaken, that my nervous

system was somewhat overwrought as a result of my hurried return from

Cairo--from Cairo where I had left behind me many a fondly cherished

hope. I addressed myself again to the task of unpacking my

steamer-trunk and was so engaged when again a sound in the corridor

outside brought me upright with a jerk.

A quick footstep approached the door, and there came a muffled rapping

upon the panel.

This time I asked no question, but leapt across the room and threw the

door open. Nayland Smith stood before me, muffled up in a heavy

traveling coat, and with his hat pulled down over his brows.

"At last!" I cried, as my friend stepped in and quickly reclosed the

door.

Smith threw his hat upon the settee, stripped off the great-coat, and

pulling out his pipe began to load it in feverish haste.

"Well," I said, standing amid the litter cast out from the trunk, and

watching him eagerly, "what's afoot?"

Nayland Smith lighted his pipe, carelessly dropping the match-end upon

the floor at his feet.

"God knows what \_is\_ afoot this time, Petrie!" he replied. "You and I

have lived no commonplace lives; Dr. Fu-Manchu has seen to that; but

if I am to believe what the Chief has told me to-day, even stranger

things are ahead of us!"

I stared at him wonder-stricken.

"That is almost incredible," I said; "terror can have no darker

meaning than that which Dr. Fu-Manchu gave to it. Fu-Manchu is dead,

so what have we to fear?"

"We have to fear," replied Smith, throwing himself into a corner of

the settee, "the Si-Fan!"

I continued to stare, uncomprehendingly.

"The Si-Fan----"

"I always knew and you always knew," interrupted Smith in his short,

decisive manner, "that Fu-Manchu, genius that he was, remained

nevertheless the servant of another or others. He was not the head of

that organization which dealt in wholesale murder, which aimed at

upsetting the balance of the world. I even knew the name of one, a

certain mandarin, and member of the Sublime Order of the White Peacock,

who was his immediate superior. I had never dared to guess at the

identity of what I may term the Head Center."

He ceased speaking, and sat gripping his pipe grimly between his teeth,

whilst I stood staring at him almost fatuously. Then--

"Evidently you have much to tell me," I said, with forced calm.

I drew up a chair beside the settee and was about to sit down.

"Suppose you bolt the door," jerked my friend.

I nodded, entirely comprehending, crossed the room and shot the little

nickel bolt into its socket.

"Now," said Smith as I took my seat, "the story is a fragmentary one

in which there are many gaps. Let us see what we know. It seems that

the despatch which led to my sudden recall (and incidentally yours)

from Egypt to London and which only reached me as I was on the point

of embarking at Suez for Rangoon, was prompted by the arrival here of

Sir Gregory Hale, whilom attaché at the British Embassy, Peking. So

much, you will remember, was conveyed in my instructions."

"Quite so."

"Furthermore, I was instructed, you'll remember, to put up at the New

Louvre Hotel; therefore you came here and engaged this suite whilst I

reported to the chief. A stranger business is before us, Petrie, I

verily believe, than any we have known hitherto. In the first place,

Sir Gregory Hale is here----"

"Here?"

"In the New Louvre Hotel. I ascertained on the way up, but not by

direct inquiry, that he occupies a suite similar to this, and

incidentally on the same floor."

"His report to the India Office, whatever its nature, must have been

a sensational one."

"He has made no report to the India Office."

"What! made no report?"

"He has not entered any office whatever, nor will he receive any

representative. He's been playing at Robinson Crusoe in a private

suite here for close upon a fortnight--\_id est\_ since the time of his

arrival in London!"

I suppose my growing perplexity was plainly visible, for Smith

suddenly burst out with his short, boyish laugh.

"Oh! I told you it was a strange business," he cried.

"Is he mad?"

Nayland Smith's gaiety left him; he became suddenly stern and grim.

"Either mad, Petrie, stark raving mad, or the savior of the Indian

Empire--perhaps of all Western civilization. Listen. Sir Gregory Hale,

whom I know slightly and who honors me, apparently, with a belief that

I am the only man in Europe worthy of his confidence, resigned his

appointment at Peking some time ago, and set out upon a private

expedition to the Mongolian frontier with the avowed intention of

visiting some place in the Gobi Desert. From the time that he actually

crossed the frontier he disappeared for nearly six months, to reappear

again suddenly and dramatically in London. He buried himself in this

hotel, refusing all visitors and only advising the authorities of his

return by telephone. He demanded that \_I\_ should be sent to see him;

and--despite his eccentric methods--so great is the Chief's faith in

Sir Gregory's knowledge of matters Far Eastern, that behold, here I am."

He broke off abruptly and sat in an attitude of tense listening. Then--

"Do you hear anything, Petrie?" he rapped.

"A sort of tapping?" I inquired, listening intently myself the while.

Smith nodded his head rapidly.

We both listened for some time, Smith with his head bent slightly

forward and his pipe held in his hands; I with my gaze upon the bolted

door. A faint mist still hung in the room, and once I thought I

detected a slight sound from the bedroom beyond, which was in darkness.

Smith noted me turn my head, and for a moment the pair of us stared

into the gap of the doorway. But the silence was complete.

"You have told me neither much nor little, Smith," I said, resuming

for some reason, in a hushed voice. "Who or what is this Si-Fan at

whose existence you hint?"

Nayland Smith smiled grimly.

"Possibly the real and hitherto unsolved riddle of Tibet, Petrie," he

replied--"a mystery concealed from the world behind the veil of

Lamaism." He stood up abruptly, glancing at a scrap of paper which he

took from his pocket--"Suite Number 14a," he said. "Come along! We have

not a moment to waste. Let us make our presence known to Sir Gregory--

the man who has dared to raise that veil."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH THE LIMP

"Lock the door!" said Smith significantly, as we stepped into the

corridor.

I did so and had turned to join my friend when, to the accompaniment

of a sort of hysterical muttering, a door further along, and on the

opposite side of the corridor, was suddenly thrown open, and a man

whose face showed ghastly white in the light of the solitary lamp

beyond, literally hurled himself out. He perceived Smith and myself

immediately. Throwing one glance back over his shoulder he came

tottering forward to meet us.

"My God! I can't stand it any longer!" he babbled, and threw himself

upon Smith, who was foremost, clutching pitifully at him for support.

"Come and see him, sir--for Heaven's sake come in! I think he's dying;

and he's going mad. I never disobeyed an order in my life before, but

I can't help myself--I can't help myself!"

"Brace up!" I cried, seizing him by the shoulders as, still clutching

at Nayland Smith, he turned his ghastly face to me. "Who are you, and

what's your trouble?"

"I'm Beeton, Sir Gregory Hale's man."

Smith started visibly, and his gaunt, tanned face seemed to me to have

grown perceptively paler.

"Come on, Petrie!" he snapped. "There's some devilry here."

Thrusting Beeton aside he rushed in at the open door--upon which, as I

followed him, I had time to note the number, 14a. It communicated with

a suite of rooms almost identical with our own. The sitting-room was

empty and in the utmost disorder, but from the direction of the

principal bedroom came a most horrible mumbling and gurgling sound--a

sound utterly indescribable. For one instant we hesitated at the

threshold--hesitated to face the horror beyond; then almost side by

side we came into the bedroom....

Only one of the two lamps was alight--that above the bed; and on the

bed a man lay writhing. He was incredibly gaunt, so that the suit of

tropical twill which he wore hung upon him in folds, showing if such

evidence were necessary, how terribly he was fallen away from his

constitutional habit. He wore a beard of at least ten days' growth,

which served to accentuate the cavitous hollowness of his face. His

eyes seemed starting from their sockets as he lay upon his back

uttering inarticulate sounds and plucking with skinny fingers at his

lips.

Smith bent forward peering into the wasted face; and then started back

with a suppressed cry.

"Merciful God! can it be Hale?" he muttered. "What does it mean? what

does it mean?"

I ran to the opposite side of the bed, and placing my arms under the

writhing man, raised him and propped a pillow at his back. He

continued to babble, rolling his eyes from side to side hideously;

then by degrees they seemed to become less glazed, and a light of

returning sanity entered them. They became fixed; and they were fixed

upon Nayland Smith, who bending over the bed, was watching Sir Gregory

(for Sir Gregory I concluded this pitiable wreck to be) with an

expression upon his face compound of many emotions.

"A glass of water," I said, catching the glance of the man Beeton,

who stood trembling at the open doorway.

Spilling a liberal quantity upon the carpet, Beeton ultimately

succeeded in conveying the glass to me. Hale, never taking his gaze

from Smith, gulped a little of the water and then thrust my hand away.

As I turned to place the tumbler upon a small table the resumed the

wordless babbling, and now, with his index finger, pointed to his

mouth.

"He has lost the power of speech!" whispered Smith.

"He was stricken dumb, gentlemen, ten minutes ago," said Beeton in a

trembling voice. "He dropped off to sleep out there on the floor, and

I brought him in here and laid him on the bed. When he woke up he was

like that!"

The man on the bed ceased his inchoate babbling and now, gulping

noisily, began to make quick nervous movements with his hands.

"He wants to write something," said Smith in a low voice. "Quick! hold

him up!" He thrust his notebook, open at a blank page, before the man

whose movement were numbered, and placed a pencil in the shaking

right hand.

Faintly and unevenly Sir Gregory commenced to write--whilst I

supported him. Across the bent shoulders Smith silently questioned me,

and my reply was a negative shake of the head.

The lamp above the bed was swaying as if in a heavy draught; I

remembered that it had been swaying as we entered. There was no fog in

the room, but already from the bleak corridor outside it was entering;

murky, yellow clouds steaming in at the open door. Save for the gulping

of the dying man, and the sobbing breaths of Beeton, there was no

sound. Six irregular lines Sir Gregory Hale scrawled upon the page;

then suddenly his body became a dead weight in my arms. Gently I laid

him back upon the pillows, gently his finger from the notebook, and,

my head almost touching Smith's as we both craned forward over the

page, read, with great difficulty, the following:--

"Guard my diary.... Tibetan frontier ... Key of India. Beware man ...

with the limp. Yellow ... rising. Watch Tibet ... the \_Si-Fan\_...."

From somewhere outside the room, whether above or below I could not be

sure, came a faint, dragging sound, accompanied by a \_tap--tap--tap\_....

CHAPTER III

"SAKYA MUNI"

The faint disturbance faded into silence again. Across the dead man's

body I met Smith's gaze. Faint wreaths of fog floated in from the

outer room. Beeton clutched the foot of the bed, and the structure

shook in sympathy with his wild trembling. That was the only sound

now; there was absolutely nothing physical so far as my memory serves

to signalize the coming of the brown man.

Yet, stealthy as his approach had been, something must have warned us.

For suddenly, with one accord, we three turned upon the bed, and

stared out into the room from which the fog wreaths floated in.

Beeton stood nearest to the door, but, although he turned, he did not

go out, but with a smothered cry crouched back against the bed. Smith

it was who moved first, then I followed, and close upon his heels

burst into the disordered sitting-room. The outer door had been closed

but not bolted, and what with the tinted light, diffused through the

silken Japanese shade, and the presence of fog in the room, I was

almost tempted to believe myself the victim of a delusion. What I saw

or thought I saw was this:--

A tall screen stood immediately inside the door, and around its end,

like some materialization of the choking mist, glided a lithe, yellow

figure, a slim, crouching figure, wearing a sort of loose robe. An

impression I had of jet-black hair, protruding from beneath a little

cap, of finely chiseled features and great, luminous eyes, then, with

no sound to tell of a door opened or shut, the apparition was gone.

"You saw him, Petrie!--you saw him!" cried Smith.

In three bounds he was across the room, had tossed the screen aside

and thrown open the door. Out he sprang into the yellow haze of the

corridor, tripped, and, uttering a cry of pain, fell sprawling upon

the marble floor. Hot with apprehension I joined him, but he looked

up with a wry smile and began furiously rubbing his left shin.

"A queer trick, Petrie," he said, rising to his feet; "but

nevertheless effective."

He pointed to the object which had occasioned his fall. It was a small

metal chest, evidently of very considerable weight, and it stood

immediately outside the door of Number 14a.

"That was what he came for, sir! That was what he came for! You were

too quick for him!"

Beeton stood behind us, his horror-bright eyes fixed upon the box.

"Eh?" rapped Smith, turning upon him.

"That's what Sir Gregory brought to England," the man ran on almost

hysterically; "that's what he's been guarding this past two weeks,

night and day, crouching over it with a loaded pistol. That's what

cost him his life, sir. He's had no peace, day or night, since he

got it...."

We were inside the room again now, Smith bearing the coffer in his

arms, and still the man ran on:

"He's never slept for more than an hour at a time, that I know of, for

weeks past. Since the day we came here he hasn't spoken to another

living soul, and he's lain there on the floor at night with his head

on that brass box, and sat watching over it all day."

"'Beeton!' he'd cry out, perhaps in the middle of the night--'Beeton--

do you hear that damned woman!' But although I'd begun to think I

could hear something, I believe it was the constant strain working on

my nerves and nothing else at all.

"Then he was always listening out for some one he called 'the man with

the limp.' Five and six times a night he'd have me up to listen with

him. 'There he goes, Beeton!' he'd whisper, crouching with his ear

pressed flat to the door. 'Do you hear him dragging himself along?'

"God knows how I've stood it as I have; for I've known no peace since

we left China. Once we got here I thought it would be better, but it's

been worse.

"Gentlemen have come (from the India Office, I believe), but he would

not see them. Said he would see no one but Mr. Nayland Smith. He had

never lain in his bed until to-night, but what with taking no proper

food nor sleep, and some secret trouble that was killing him by inches,

he collapsed altogether a while ago, and I carried him in and laid him

on the bed as I told you. Now he's dead--now he's dead."

Beeton leant up against the mantelpiece and buried his face in his

hands, whilst his shoulders shook convulsively. He had evidently been

greatly attached to his master, and I found something very pathetic in

this breakdown of a physically strong man. Smith laid his hands upon

his shoulders.

"You have passed through a very trying ordeal," he said, "and no man

could have done his duty better; but forces beyond your control have

proved too strong for you. I am Nayland Smith."

The man spun around with a surprising expression of relief upon his

pale face.

"So that whatever can be done," continued my friend, "to carry out

your master's wishes, will be done now. Rely upon it. Go into your

room and lie down until we call you."

"Thank you, sir, and thank God you are here," said Beeton dazedly, and

with one hand raised to his head he went, obediently, to the smaller

bedroom and disappeared within.

"Now, Petrie," rapped Smith, glancing around the littered floor,

"since I am empowered to deal with this matter as I see fit, and since

you are a medical man, we can devote the next half-hour, at any rate,

to a strictly confidential inquiry into this most perplexing case. I

propose that you examine the body for any evidences that may assist

you determining the cause of death, whilst I make a few inquiries here."

I nodded, without speaking, and went into the bedroom. It contained not

one solitary item of the dead man's belongings, and in every way bore

out Beeton's statement that Sir Gregory had never inhabited it. I bent

over Hale, as he lay fully dressed upon the bed.

Saving the singularity of the symptom which had immediately preceded

death--viz., the paralysis of the muscles of articulation--I should

have felt disposed to ascribe his end to sheer inanition; and a

cursory examination brought to light nothing contradictory to that

view. Not being prepared to proceed further in the matter at the moment

I was about to rejoin Smith, whom I could hear rummaging about amongst

the litter of the outer room, when I made a curious discovery.

Lying in a fold of the disordered bed linen were a few petals of some

kind of blossom, three of them still attached to a fragment of slender

stalk.

I collected the tiny petals, mechanically, and held them in the palm

of my hand studying them for some moments before the mystery of their

presence there became fully appreciable to me. Then I began to wonder.

The petals (which I was disposed to class as belonging to some species

of \_Curcas\_ or Physic Nut), though bruised, were fresh, and therefore

could not have been in the room for many hours. How had they been

introduced, and by whom? Above all, what could their presence there

at that time portend?

"Smith," I called, and walked towards the door carrying the mysterious

fragments in my palm. "Look what I have found upon the bed."

Nayland Smith, who was bending over an open despatch case which he had

placed upon a chair, turned--and his glance fell upon the petals and

tiny piece of stem.

I think I have never seen so sudden a change of expression take place

in the face of any man. Even in that imperfect light I saw him blanch.

I saw a hard glitter come into his eyes. He spoke, evenly, but hoarsely:

"Put those things down----there, on the table; anywhere."

I obeyed him without demur; for something in his manner had chilled me

with foreboding.

"You did not break that stalk?"

"No. I found it as you see it."

"Have you smelled the petals?"

I shook my head. Thereupon, having his eyes fixed upon me with the

strangest expression in their gray depths, Nayland Smith said a

singular thing.

"Pronounce, slowly, the words \_Sâkya Mûni,\_'" he directed.

I stared at him, scarce crediting my senses; but----

"I mean it!" he rapped. "Do as I tell you."

"Sâkya Mûni," I said, in ever increasing wonder.

Smith laughed unmirthfully.

"Go into the bathroom and thoroughly wash your hands," was his next

order. "Renew the water at least three times." As I turned to fulfill

his instructions, for I doubted no longer his deadly earnestness:

"Beeton!" he called.

Beeton, very white-faced and shaky, came out from the bedroom as I

entered the bathroom, and whist I proceeded carefully to cleanse my

hands I heard Smith interrogating him.

"Have any flowers been brought into the room today, Beeton?"

"Flowers, sir? Certainly not. Nothing has ever been brought in here

but what I have brought myself."

"You are certain of that?"

"Positive."

"Who brought up the meals, then?"

"If you'll look into my room here, sir, you'll see that I have enough

tinned and bottled stuff to last us for weeks. Sir Gregory sent me out

to buy it on the day we arrived. No one else had left or entered these

rooms until you came to-night."

I returned to find Nayland Smith standing tugging at the lobe of his

left ear in evident perplexity. He turned to me.

"I find my hands over full," he said. "Will you oblige me by

telephoning for Inspector Weymouth? Also, I should be glad if you

would ask M. Samarkan, the manager, to see me here immediately."

As I was about to quit the room--

"Not a word of our suspicions to M. Samarkan," he added; "not a word

about the brass box."

I was far along the corridor ere I remembered that which, remembered

earlier, had saved me the journey. There was a telephone in every suite.

However, I was not indisposed to avail myself of an opportunity for a

few moments' undisturbed reflection, and, avoiding the lift, I

descended by the broad, marble staircase.

To what strange adventure were we committed? What did the brass coffer

contain which Sir Gregory had guarded night and day? Something

associated in some way with Tibet, something which he believed to be

"the key of India" and which had brought in its train, presumably,

the sinister "man with a limp."

Who was the "man with the limp"? What was the Si-Fan? Lastly, by what

conceivable means could the flower, which my friend evidently regarded

with extreme horror, have been introduced into Hale's room, and why

had I been required to pronounce the words "Sâkya Mûni"?

So ran my reflections--at random and to no clear end; and, as is often

the case in such circumstances, my steps bore them company; so that

all at once I became aware that instead of having gained the lobby of

the hotel, I had taken some wrong turning and was in a part of the

building entirely unfamiliar to me.

A long corridor of the inevitable white marble extended far behind me.

I had evidently traversed it. Before me was a heavily curtained archway.

Irritably, I pulled the curtain aside, learnt that it masked a

glass-paneled door, opened this door--and found myself in a small

court, dimly lighted and redolent of some pungent, incense-like perfume.

One step forward I took, then pulled up abruptly. A sound had come to

my ears. From a second curtained doorway, close to my right hand, it

came--a sound of muffled \_tapping\_, together with that of something

which dragged upon the floor.

Within my brain the words seemed audibly to form: "The man with

the limp!"

I sprang to the door; I had my hand upon the drapery ... when a woman

stepped out, barring the way!

No impression, not even a vague one, did I form of her costume, save

that she wore a green silk shawl, embroidered with raised white

figures of birds, thrown over her head and shoulders and draped in

such fashion that part of her face was concealed. I was transfixed

by the vindictive glare of her eyes, of her huge dark eyes.

They were ablaze with anger--but it was not this expression within

them which struck me so forcibly as the fact that they were in some

way familiar.

Motionless, we faced one another. Then--

"You go away," said the woman--at the same time extending her arms

across the doorway as barriers to my progress.

Her voice had a husky intonation; her hands and arms, which were bare

and of old ivory hue, were laden with barbaric jewelry, much of it

tawdry silverware of the bazaars. Clearly she was a half-caste of some

kind, probably a Eurasian.

I hesitated. The sounds of dragging and tapping had ceased. But the

presence of this grotesque Oriental figure only increased my anxiety

to pass the doorway. I looked steadily into the black eyes; they looked

into mine unflinchingly.

"You go away, please," repeated the woman, raising her right hand and

pointing to the door whereby I had entered. "These private rooms. What

you doing here?"

Her words, despite her broken English, served to recall to me the fact

that I was, beyond doubt, a trespasser! By what right did I presume to

force my way into other people's apartments?

"There is some one in there whom I must see," I said, realizing,

however, that my chance of doing so was poor.

"You see nobody," she snapped back uncompromisingly. "You go away!"

She took a step towards me, continuing to point to the door. Where had

I previously encountered the glance of those splendid, savage eyes?

So engaged was I with this taunting, partial memory, and so sure, if

the woman would but uncover her face, of instantly recognizing her,

that still I hesitated. Whereupon, glancing rapidly over her shoulder

into whatever place lay beyond the curtained doorway, she suddenly

stepped back and vanished, drawing the curtains to with an angry jerk.

I heard her retiring footsteps; then came a loud bang. If her object

in intercepting me had been to cover the slow retreat of some one she

had succeeded.

Recognizing that I had cut a truly sorry figure in the encounter, I

retraced my steps.

By what route I ultimately regained the main staircase I have no idea;

for my mind was busy with that taunting memory of the two dark eyes

looking out from the folds of the green embroidered shawl. Where, and

when, had I met their glance before?

To that problem I sought an answer in vain.

The message despatched to New Scotland Yard, I found M. Samarkan, long

famous as a \_mâitre d' hôtel\_ in Cairo, and now host of London's

newest and most palatial \_khan\_. Portly, and wearing a gray imperial,

M. Samarkan had the manners of a courtier, and the smile of a true Greek.

I told him what was necessary, and no more, desiring him to go to

suite 14a without delay and also without arousing unnecessary

attention. I dropped no hint of foul play, but M. Samarkan expressed

profound (and professional) regret that so distinguished, though

unprofitable, a patron should have selected the New Louvre, thus

early in its history, as the terminus of his career.

"By the way," I said, "have you Oriental guests with you, at the moment?"

"No, monsieur," he assured me.

"Not a certain Oriental lady?" I persisted.

M. Samarkan slowly shook his head.

"Possibly monsieur has seen one of the \_ayahs?\_ There are several

Anglo-Indian families resident in the New Louvre at present."

An \_ayah?\_ It was just possible, of course. Yet ...

CHAPTER IV

THE FLOWER OF SILENCE

"We are dealing now," said Nayland Smith, pacing restlessly up and

down our sitting-room, "not, as of old, with Dr. Fu-Manchu, but with

an entirely unknown quantity--the Si-Fan."

"For Heaven's sake!" I cried, "what is the Si-Fan?"

"The greatest mystery of the mysterious East, Petrie. Think. You know,

as I know, that a malignant being, Dr. Fu-Manchu, was for some time

in England, engaged in 'paving the way' (I believe those words were

my own) for nothing less than a giant Yellow Empire. That dream is

what millions of Europeans and Americans term 'the Yellow Peril! Very

good. Such an empire needs must have----"

"An emperor!"

Nayland Smith stopped his restless pacing immediately in front of me.

"Why not an \_empress\_, Petrie!" he rapped.

His words were something of a verbal thunderbolt; I found myself at

loss for any suitable reply.

"You will perhaps remind me," he continued rapidly, "of the lowly place

held by women in the East. I can cite notable exceptions, ancient and

modern. In fact, a moment's consideration by a hypothetical body of

Eastern dynast-makers not of an emperor but of an empress. Finally,

there is a persistent tradition throughout the Far East that such a

woman will one day rule over the known peoples. I was assured some

years ago, by a very learned pundit, that a princess of incalculably

ancient lineage, residing in some secret monastery in Tartary or Tibet,

was to be the future empress of the world. I believe this tradition,

or the extensive group who seek to keep it alive and potent, to be

what is called the Si-Fan!"

I was past greater amazement; but--

"This lady can be no longer young, then?" I asked.

"On the contrary, Petrie, she remains always young and beautiful by

means of a continuous series of reincarnations; also she thus

conserves the collated wisdom of many ages. In short, she is the

archetype of Lamaism. The real secret of Lama celibacy is the existence

of this immaculate ruler, of whom the Grand Lama is merely a high

priest. She has, as attendants, maidens of good family, selected for

their personal charms, and rendered dumb in order that they may never

report what they see and hear."

"Smith!" I cried, "this is utterly incredible!"

"Her body slaves are not only mute, but blind; for it is death to look

upon her beauty unveiled."

I stood up impatiently.

"You are amusing yourself," I said.

Nayland Smith clapped his hands upon my shoulders, in his own

impulsive fashion, and looked earnestly into my eyes.

"Forgive me, old man," he said, "if I have related all these fantastic

particulars as though I gave them credence. Much of this is legendary,

I know, some of it mere superstition, but--I am serious now, Petrie--

\_part of it is true\_."

I stared at the square-cut, sun-tanned face; and no trace of a smile

lurked about that grim mouth. "Such a woman may actually exist, Petrie,

only in legend; but, nevertheless, she forms the head center of that

giant conspiracy in which the activities of Dr. Fu-Manchu were merely

a part. Hale blundered on to this stupendous business; and from what I

have gathered from Beeton and what I have seen for myself, it is

evident that in yonder coffer"--he pointed to the brass chest standing

hard by--"Hale got hold of something indispensable to the success of

this vast Yellow conspiracy. That he was followed here, to the very

hotel, by agents of this mystic Unknown is evident. But," he added

grimly, "they have failed in their object!"

A thousand outrageous possibilities fought for precedence in my mind.

"Smith!" I cried, "the half-caste woman whom I saw in the hotel ..."

Nayland Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably, as M. Samarkan suggests, an \_ayah!\_" he said; but there was

an odd note in his voice and an odd look in his eyes.

"Then again, I am almost certain that Hale's warning concerning 'the

man with the limp' was no empty one. Shall you open the brass chest?"

"At present, decidedly \_no\_. Hale's fate renders his warning one that

I dare not neglect. For I was with him when he died; and they cannot

know how much \_I\_ know. How did he die? How did he die? How was the

Flower of Silence introduced into his closely guarded room?"

"The Flower of Silence?"

Smith laughed shortly and unmirthfully.

"I was once sent for," he said, "during the time that I was stationed

in Upper Burma, to see a stranger--a sort of itinerant Buddhist priest,

so I understood, who had desired to communicate some message to me

personally. He was dying--in a dirty hut on the outskirts of Manipur,

up in the hills. When I arrived I say at a glance that the man was a

Tibetan monk. He must have crossed the river and come down through

Assam; but the nature of his message I never knew. He had lost the

power of speech! He was gurgling, inarticulate, just like poor Hale.

A few moments after my arrival he breathed his last. The fellow who

had guided me to the place bent over him--I shall always remember the

scene--then fell back as though he had stepped upon an adder.

"'He holds the Flower Silence in his hand!' he cried--'the Si-Fan! the

Si-Fan!'--and bolted from the hut."

"When I went to examine the dead man, sure enough he held in one hand

a little crumpled spray of flowers. I did not touch it with my fingers

naturally, but I managed to loop a piece of twine around the stem,

and by that means I gingerly removed the flowers and carried them to

an orchid-hunter of my acquaintance who chanced to be visiting Manipur.

"Grahame--that was my orchid man's name--pronounced the specimen to be

an unclassified species of \_jatropha;\_ belonging to the \_Curcas\_

family. He discovered a sort of hollow thorn, almost like a fang,

amongst the blooms, but was unable to surmise the nature of its

functions. He extracted enough of a certain fixed oil from the flowers,

however, to have poisoned the pair of us!"

"Probably the breaking of a bloom ..."

"Ejects some of this acrid oil through the thorn? Practically the

uncanny thing stings when it is hurt? That is my own idea, Petrie. And

I can understand how these Eastern fanatics accept their sentence--

silence and death--when they have deserved it, at the hands of their

mysterious organization, and commit this novel form of \_hara-kiri\_.

But I shall not sleep soundly with that brass coffer in my possession

until I know by what means Sir Gregory was induced to touch a Flower

of Silence, and by what means it was placed in his room!"

"But, Smith, why did you direct me to-night to repeat the words,

'Sâkya Mûni'?"

Smith smiled in a very grim fashion.

"It was after the episode I have just related that I made the

acquaintance of that pundit, some of whose statements I have already

quoted for your enlightenment. He admitted that the Flower of Silence

was an instrument frequently employed by a certain group, adding that,

according to some authorities, one who had touched the flower might

escape death by immediately pronouncing the sacred name of Buddha. He

was no fanatic himself, however, and, marking my incredulity, he

explained that the truth was this;--

"No one whose powers of speech were imperfect could possibly pronounce

correctly the words 'Sâkya Mûni.' Therefore, since the first

effects of this damnable thing is instantly to tie the tongue, the

uttering of the sacred name of Buddha becomes practically a test

whereby the victim my learn whether the venom has entered his system

or not!"

I repressed a shudder. An atmosphere of horror seemed to be enveloping

us, foglike.

"Smith," I said slowly, "we must be on our guard," for at last I had

run to earth that elusive memory. "Unless I am strangely mistaken,

the 'man' who so mysteriously entered Hale's room and the supposed

\_ayah\_ whom I met downstairs are one and the same. Two, at least, of

the Yellow group are actually here in the New Louvre!"

The light of the shaded lamp shone down upon the brass coffer on the

table beside me. The fog seemed to have cleared from the room somewhat,

but since in the midnight stillness I could detect the muffled sounds

of sirens from the river and the reports of fog signals from the

railways, I concluded that the night was not yet wholly clear of the

choking mist. In accordance with a pre-arranged scheme we had decided

to guard "the key of India" (whatever it might be) turn and turn about

through the night. In a word--we feared to sleep unguarded. Now my

watch informed me that four o'clock approached, at which hour I was

to arouse Smith and retire to sleep to my own bedroom.

Nothing had disturbed my vigil--that is, nothing definite. True once,

about half an hour earlier, I had thought I heard the dragging and

tapping sound from somewhere up above me; but since the corridor

overhead was unfinished and none of the rooms opening upon it yet

habitable, I concluded that I had been mistaken. The stairway at the

end of our corridor, which communicated with that above, was still

blocked with bags of cement and slabs of marble, in fact.

Faintly to my ears came the booming of London's clocks, beating out

the hour of four. But still I sat beside the mysterious coffer,

indisposed to awaken my friend any sooner than was necessary,

particularly since I felt in no way sleepy myself.

I was to learn a lesson that night: the lesson of strict adherence to

a compact. I had arranged to awaken Nayland Smith at four; and because

I dallied, determined to finish my pipe ere entering his bedroom,

almost it happened that Fate placed it beyond my power ever to awaken

him again.

At ten minutes past four, amid a stillness so intense that the

creaking of my slippers seemed a loud disturbance, I crossed the room

and pushed open the door of Smith's bedroom. It was in darkness, but

as I entered I depressed the switch immediately inside the door,

lighting the lamp which swung form the center of the ceiling.

Glancing towards the bed, I immediately perceived that there was

something different in its aspect, but at first I found this

difference difficult to define. I stood for a moment in doubt. Then

I realized the nature of the change which had taken place.

A lamp hung above the bed, attached to a movable fitting, which

enabled it to be raised or lowered at the pleasure of the occupant.

When Smith had retired he was in no reading mood, and he had not even

lighted the reading-lamp, but had left it pushed high up against the

ceiling.

It was the position of this lamp which had changed. For now it swung

so low over the pillow that the silken fringe of the shade almost

touched my friend's face as he lay soundly asleep with one

lean brown hand outstretched upon the coverlet.

I stood in the doorway staring, mystified, at this phenomenon; I might

have stood there without intervening, until intervention had been too

late, were it not that, glancing upward toward the wooden block from

which ordinarily the pendant hung, I perceived that no block was

visible, but only a round, black cavity from which the white flex

supporting the lamp swung out.

Then, uttering a horse cry which rose unbidden to my lips, I sprang

wildly across the room ... for now I had seen something else!

Attached to one of the four silken tassels which ornamented the

lamp-shade, so as almost to rest upon the cheek of the sleeping man,

was a little corymb of bloom ... the \_Flower of Silence!\_

Grasping the shade with my left hand I seized the flex with my right,

and as Smith sprang upright in bed, eyes wildly glaring, I wrenched

with all my might. Upward my gaze was set; and I glimpsed a yellow

hand, with long, pointed finger nails. There came a loud resounding

snap; an electric spark spat venomously from the circular opening

above the bed; and, with the cord and lamp still fast in my grip, I

went rolling across the carpet--as the other lamp became instantly

extinguished.

Dimly I perceived Smith, arrayed in pyjamas, jumping out upon the

opposite side of the bed.

"Petrie, Petrie!" he cried, "where are you? what has happened?"

A laugh, little short of hysterical, escaped me. I gathered myself up

and made for the lighted sitting-room.

"Quick, Smith!" I said--but I did not recognize my own voice. "Quick--

come out of that room."

I crossed to the settee, and shaking in every limb, sank down upon it.

Nayland Smith, still wild-eyed, and his face a mask of bewilderment,

came out of the bedroom and stood watching me.

"For God's sake what has happened, Petrie?" he demanded, and began

clutching at the lobe of his left ear and looking all about the room

dazedly.

"The Flower of Silence!" I said; "some one has been at work in the top

corridor.... Heaven knows when, for since we engaged these rooms we

have not been much away from them ... the same device as in the case

of poor Hale.... You would have tried to brush the thing away ..."

A light of understanding began to dawn in my friend's eyes. He drew

himself stiffly upright, and in a loud, harsh voice uttered the words:

"Sâkya Mûni"--and again: "Sâkya Mûni."

"Thank God!" I said shakily. "I was not too late."

Nayland Smith, with much rattling of glass, poured out two stiff pegs

from the decanter. Then--

"\_Ssh!\_what's that?" he whispered.

He stood, tense, listening, his head cast slightly to one side.

A very faint sound of shuffling and tapping was perceptible, coming,

as I thought, from the incomplete stairway communicating with the upper

corridor.

"The man with the limp!" whispered Smith.

He bounded to the door and actually had one hand upon the bolt, when

he turned, and fixed his gaze upon the brass box.

"No!" he snapped; "there are occasions when prudence should rule.

Neither of us must leave these rooms to-night!"

CHAPTER V

JOHN KI'S

"What is the meaning of Si-Fan?" asked Detective-sergeant Fletcher.

He stood looking from the window at the prospect below; at the trees

bordering the winding embankment; at the ancient monolith which for

unnumbered ages had looked across desert sands to the Nile, and now

looked down upon another river of many mysteries. The view seemed to

absorb his attention. He spoke without turning his head.

Nayland Smith laughed shortly.

"The Si-Fan are the natives of Eastern Tibet," he replied.

"But the term has some other significance, sir?" said the detective;

his words were more of an assertion than a query.

"It has," replied my friend grimly. "I believe it to be the name, or

perhaps the sigil, of an extensive secret society with branches

stretching out into every corner of the Orient."

We were silent for awhile. Inspector Weymouth, who sat in a chair near

the window, glanced appreciatively at the back of his subordinate, who

still stood looking out. Detective-sergeant Fletcher was one of

Scotland Yard's coming men. He had information of the first importance

to communicate, and Nayland Smith had delayed his departure upon an

urgent errand in order to meet him.

"Your case to date, Mr. Smith," continued Fletcher, remaining with

hands locked behind him, staring from the window, "reads something like

this, I believe: A brass box, locked, contents unknown, has come into

your possession. It stands now upon the table there. It was brought

from Tibet by a man who evidently thought that it had something to

do with the Si-Fan. He is dead, possibly by the agency of members of

this group. No arrests have been made. You know that there are people

here in London who are anxious to regain the box. You have theories

respecting the identity of some of them, but there are practically no

facts."

Nayland Smith nodded his head.

"Exactly!" he snapped.

"Inspector Weymouth, here," continued Fletcher, "has put me in

possession of such facts as are known to him, and I believe that I

have had the good fortune to chance upon a valuable one."

"You interest me, Sergeant Fletcher," said Smith. "What is the nature

of this clue?"

"I will tell you," replied the other, and turned briskly upon his heel

to face us.

He had a dark, clean-shaven face, rather sallow complexion, and

deep-set, searching eyes. There was decision in the square, cleft chin

and strong character in the cleanly chiseled features. His manner was

alert.

"I have specialized in Chinese crime," he said; "much of my time is

spent amongst our Asiatic visitors. I am fairly familiar with the

Easterns who use the port of London, and I have a number of useful

acquaintances among them."

Nayland Smith nodded. Beyond doubt Detective-sergeant Fletcher knew

his business.

"To my lasting regret," Fletcher continued, "I never met the late Dr.

Fu-Manchu. I understand, sir, that you believe him to have been a high

official of this dangerous society? However, I think we may get in

touch with some other notabilities; for instance, I'm told that one

of the people you're looking for has been described as 'the man with

the limp'?"

Smith, who had been about to relight his pipe, dropped the match on

the carpet and set his foot upon it. His eyes shone like steel.

"'The man with the limp,'" he said, and slowly rose to his feet--"what

do you know of the man with the limp?"

Fletcher's face flushed slightly; his words had proved more dramatic

than he had anticipated.

"There's a place down Shadwell way," he replied, "of which, no doubt,

you will have heard; it has no official title, but it is known to

habitués as the Joy-Shop...."

Inspector Weymouth stood up, his burly figure towering over that of

his slighter confrère.

"I don't think you know John Ki's, Mr. Smith," he said. "We keep all

those places pretty well patrolled, and until this present business

cropped up, John's establishment had never given us any trouble."

"What is this Joy-Shop?" I asked.

"A resort of shady characters, mostly Asiatics," replied Weymouth.

"It's a gambling-house, an unlicensed drinking-shop, and even worse--

but it's more use to us open than it would be shut."

"It is one of my regular jobs to keep an eye on the visitors to the

Joy-Shop," continued Fletcher. "I have many acquaintances who use the

place. Needless to add, they don't know my real business! Well,

lately several of them have asked me if I know who the man is that

hobbles about the place with two sticks. Everybody seems to have

heard him, but no one has seen him."

Nayland Smith began to pace the floor restlessly.

"I have heard him myself," added Fletcher, "but never managed to get

so much as a glimpse of him. When I learnt about this Si-Fan mystery,

I realized that he might very possibly be the man for whom you're

looking--and a golden opportunity has cropped up for you to visit the

Joy-Shop, and, if our luck remains in, to get a peep behind the scenes."

"I am all attention," snapped Smith.

"A woman called Zarmi has recently put in an appearance at the

Joy-Shop. Roughly speaking, she turned up at about the same time as

the unseen man with the limp...."

Nayland Smith's eyes were blazing with suppressed excitement; he was

pacing quickly up and down the floor, tugging at the lobe of his left

ear.

"She is--different in some way from any other woman I have ever seen

in the place. She's a Eurasian and good-looking, after a tigerish

fashion. I have done my best"--he smiled slightly--"to get in her good

books, and up to a point I've succeeded. I was there last night, and

Zarmi asked me if I knew what she called a 'strong feller.'

"'These,' she informed me, contemptuously referring to the rest of the

company, 'are poor weak Johnnies!'

"I had nothing definite in view at the time, for I had not then heard

about your return to London, but I thought it might lead to something

anyway, so I promised to bring a friend along to-night. I don't know

what we're wanted to do, but ..."

"Count on me!" snapped Smith. "I will leave all details to you and to

Weymouth, and I will be at New Scotland Yard this evening in time to

adopt a suitable disguise. Petrie"--he turned impetuously to me--"I

fear I shall have to go without you; but I shall be in safe company,

as you see, and doubtless Weymouth can find you a part in his portion

of the evening's program."

He glanced at his watch.

"Ah! I must be off. If you will oblige me, Petrie, by putting the

brass box into my smaller portmanteau, whilst I slip my coat on,

perhaps Weymouth, on his way out, will be good enough to order a taxi.

I shall venture to breathe again once our unpleasant charge is safely

deposited in the bank vaults!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SI-FAN MOVE

A slight drizzling rain was falling as Smith entered the cab which

the hall-porter had summoned. The brown bag in his hand contained the

brass box which actually was responsible for our presence in London.

The last glimpse I had of him through the glass of the closed window

showed him striking a match to light his pipe--which he rarely allowed

to grow cool.

Oppressed with an unaccountable weariness of spirit, I stood within

the lobby looking out upon the grayness of London in November. A

slight mental effort was sufficient to blot out that drab prospect and

to conjure up before my mind's eye a balcony overlooking the Nile--a

glimpse of dusty palms, a white wall overgrown with purple blossoms,

and above all the dazzling vault of Egypt. Upon the balcony my

imagination painted a figure, limning it with loving details, the

figure of Kâramaneh; and I thought that her glorious eyes would be

sorrowful and her lips perhaps a little tremulous, as, her arms resting

upon the rail of the balcony, she looked out across the smiling river

to the domes and minarets of Cairo--and beyond, into the hazy distance;

seeing me in dreary, rain-swept London, as I saw her, at Gezîra

beneath the cloudless sky of Egypt.

From these tender but mournful reflections I aroused myself, almost

angrily, and set off through the muddy streets towards Charing Cross;

for I was availing myself of the opportunity to call upon Dr. Murray,

who had purchased my small suburban practice when (finally, as I

thought at the time) I had left London.

This matter occupied me for the greater part of the afternoon, and I

returned to the New Louvre Hotel shortly after five, and seeing no one

in the lobby whom I knew, proceeded immediately to our apartment.

Nayland Smith was not there, and having made some changes in my attire

I descended again and inquired if he had left any message for me.

The booking-clerk informed me that Smith had not returned; therefore I

resigned myself to wait. I purchased an evening paper and settled down

in the lounge where I had an uninterrupted view of the entrance doors.

The dinner hour approached, but still my friend failed to put in an

appearance. Becoming impatient, I entered a call-box and rang up

Inspector Weymouth.

Smith had not been to Scotland Yard, nor had they received any message

from him. Perhaps it would appear that there was little cause for alarm

in this, but I, familiar with my friend's punctual and exact habits,

became strangely uneasy. I did not wish to make myself ridiculous,

but growing restlessness impelled me to institute inquiries regarding

the cabman who had driven my friend. The result of these was to

increase rather than to allay my fears.

The man was a stranger to the hall-porter, and he was not one of the

taximen who habitually stood upon the neighboring rank; no one seemed

to have noticed the number of the cab.

And now my mind began to play with strange doubts and fears. The driver,

I recollected, had been a small, dark man, possessing remarkably

well-cut olive-hued features. Had he not worn spectacles he would

indeed have been handsome, in an effeminate fashion.

I was almost certain, by this time, that he had not been an Englishman;

I was almost certain that some catastrophe had befallen Smith. Our

ceaseless vigilance had been momentarily relaxed--and this was the

result!

At some large bank branches there is a resident messenger. Even

granting that such was the case in the present instance, I doubted if

the man could help me, unless, as was possible, he chanced to be

familiar with my friend's appearance, and had actually seen him there

that day. I determined, at any rate, to make the attempt; reentering

the call-box, I asked for the bank's number.

There proved to be a resident messenger, who, after a time, replied to

my call. He knew Nayland Smith very well by sight, and as he had been

on duty in the public office of the bank at the time that Smith should

have arrived, he assured me that my friend had not been there that day!

"Besides, sir," he said, "you say he came to deposit valuables of some

kind here?"

"Yes, yes!" I cried eagerly.

"I take all such things down on the lift to the vaults at night, sir,

under the supervision of the assistant manager--and I can assure you

that nothing of the kind has been left with us to-day."

I stepped out of the call-box unsteadily. Indeed, I clutched at the

door for support.

"What is the meaning of Si-Fan?" Detective-sergeant Fletcher had asked

that morning. None of us could answer him; none of us knew. With a

haze seeming to dance between my eyes and the active life in the lobby

before me, I realized that the Si-Fan--that unseen, sinister power--

had reached out and plucked my friend from the very midst of this

noisy life about me, into its own mysterious, deathly silence.

CHAPTER VII

CHINATOWN

"It's no easy matter," said Inspector Weymouth, "to patrol the vicinity

of John Ki's Joy-Shop without their getting wind of it. The entrance,

as you'll see, is a long, narrow rat-hole of a street running at right

angles to the Thames. There's no point, so far as I know, from which

the yard can be overlooked; and the back is on a narrow cutting

belonging to a disused mill."

I paid little attention to his words. Disguised beyond all chance of

recognition even by one intimate with my appearance, I was all

impatience to set out. I had taken Smith's place in the night's

program; for, every possible source of information having been tapped

in vain, I now hoped against hope that some clue to the fate of my poor

friend might be obtained at the Chinese den which he had designed to

visit with Fletcher.

The latter, who presented a strange picture in his make-up as a sort

of half-caste sailor, stared doubtfully at the Inspector; then--

"The River Police cutter," he said, "can drop down on the tide and lie

off under the Surrey bank. There's a vacant wharf facing the end of

the street and we can slip through and show a light there, to let you

know we've arrived. You reply in the same way. If there's any

trouble, I shall blaze away with this"--he showed the butt of a

Service revolver protruding from his hip pocket--"and you can be

ashore in no time."

The plan had one thing to commend it, viz., that no one could devise

another. Therefore it was adopted, and five minutes later a taxi-cab

swung out of the Yard containing Inspector Weymouth and two ruffianly

looking companions--myself and Fletcher.

Any zest with which, at another time, I might have entered upon such

an expedition, was absent now. I bore with me a gnawing anxiety and

sorrow that precluded all conversation on my part, save monosyllabic

replies, to questions that I comprehended but vaguely.

At the River Police Depot we found Inspector Ryman, an old acquaintance,

awaiting us. Weymouth had telephoned from Scotland Yard.

"I've got a motor-boat at the breakwater," said Ryman, nodding to

Fletcher, and staring hard at me.

Weymouth laughed shortly.

"Evidently you don't recognize Dr. Petrie!" he said.

"Eh!" cried Ryman--"Dr. Petrie! why, good heavens, Doctor, I should

never have known you in a month of Bank holidays! What's afoot,

then?"--and he turned to Weymouth, eyebrows raised interrogatively.

"It's the Fu-Manchu business again, Ryman."

"Fu-Manchu! But I thought the Fu-Manchu case was off the books long

ago? It was always a mystery to me; never a word in the papers; and

we as much in the dark as everybody else--but didn't I hear that the

Chinaman, Fu-Manchu, was dead?"

Weymouth nodded.

"Some of his friends seem to be very much alive, though" he said.

"It appears that Fu-Manchu, for all his genius--and there's no denying

he was a genius, Ryman--was only the agent of somebody altogether

bigger."

Ryman whistled softly.

"Has the real head of affairs arrived, then?"

"We find we are up against what is known as the Si-Fan."

At that it came to the inevitable, unanswerable question.

"What is the Si-Fan?"

I laughed, but my laughter was not mirthful. Inspector Weymouth shook

his head.

"Perhaps Mr. Nayland Smith could tell you that," he replied; "for the

Si-Fan got him to-day!"

"Got him!" cried Ryman.

"Absolutely! He's vanished! And Fletcher here has found out that John

Ki's place is in some way connected with this business."

I interrupted--impatiently, I fear.

"Then let us set out, Inspector," I said, "for it seems to me that we

are wasting precious time--and you know what that may mean." I turned

to Fletcher. "Where is this place situated, exactly? How do we proceed?"

"The cab can take us part of the way," he replied, "and we shall have

to walk the rest. Patrons of John's don't turn up in taxis, as a rule!"

"Then let us be off," I said, and made for the door.

"Don't forget the signal!" Weymouth cried after me, "and don't venture

into the place until you've received our reply...."

But I was already outside, Fletcher following; and a moment later we

were both in the cab and off into a maze of tortuous streets toward

John Ki's Joy-Shop.

With the coming of nightfall the rain had ceased, but the sky remained

heavily overcast and the air was filled with clammy mist. It was a

night to arouse longings for Southern skies; and when, discharging

the cabman, we set out afoot along a muddy and ill-lighted

thoroughfare bordered on either side by high brick walls, their

monotony occasionally broken by gateways, I felt that the load of

depression which had settled upon my shoulders must ere long bear me

down.

Sounds of shunting upon some railway siding came to my ears; train

whistles and fog signals hooted and boomed. River sounds there were,

too, for we were close beside the Thames, that gray old stream which

has borne upon its bier many a poor victim of underground London. The

sky glowed sullenly red above.

"There's the Joy-Shop, along on the left," said Fletcher, breaking in

upon my reflections. "You'll notice a faint light; it's shining out

through the open door. Then, here is the wharf."

He began fumbling with the fastenings of a dilapidated gateway beside

which we were standing; and a moment later--

"All right--slip through," he said.

I followed him through the narrow gap which the ruinous state of the

gates had enabled him to force, and found myself looking under a low

arch, with the Thames beyond, and a few hazy lights coming and going

on the opposite bank.

"Go steady!" warned Fletcher. "It's only a few paces to the edge of

the wharf."

I heard him taking a box of matches from his pocket.

"Here is my electric lamp," I said. "It will serve the purpose better."

"Good," muttered my companion. "Show a light down here, so that we

can find our way."

With the aid of the lamp we found our way out on to the rotting

timbers of the crazy structure. The mist hung denser over the river,

but through it, as through a dirty gauze curtain, it was possible

to discern some of the greater lights on the opposite shore. These,

without exception, however, showed high up upon the fog curtain;

along the water level lay a belt of darkness.

"Let me give them the signal," said Fletcher, shivering slightly and

taking the lamp from my hand.

He flashed the light two or three times. Then we both stood watching

the belt of darkness that followed the Surrey shore. The tide lapped

upon the timbers supporting the wharf and little whispers and gurgling

sounds stole up from beneath our feet. Once there was a faint splash

from somewhere below and behind us.

"There goes a rat," said Fletcher vaguely, and without taking his gaze

from the darkness under the distant shore. "It's gone into the cutting

at the back of John Ki's."

He ceased speaking and flashed the lamp again several times. Then, all

at once out of the murky darkness into which we were peering, looked

a little eye of light--once, twice, thrice it winked at us from low

down upon the oily water; then was gone.

"It's Weymouth with the cutter," said Fletcher; "they are ready ...

now for Jon Ki's."

We stumbled back up the slight acclivity beneath the archway to the

street, leaving the ruinous gates as we had found them. Into the

uninviting little alley immediately opposite we plunged, and where

the faint yellow luminance showed upon the muddy path before us,

Fletcher paused a moment, whispering to me warningly.

"Don't speak if you can help it," he said; "if you do, mumble any old

jargon in any language you like, and throw in plenty of cursing!"

He grasped me by the arm, and I found myself crossing the threshold of

the Joy-Shop--I found myself in a meanly furnished room no more than

twelve feet square and very low ceiled, smelling strongly of paraffin

oil. The few items of furniture which it contained were but dimly

discernible in the light of a common tin lamp which stood upon a

packing-case at the head of what looked like cellar steps.

Abruptly, I pulled up; for this stuffy little den did not correspond

with pre-conceived ideas of the place for which we were bound. I was

about to speak when Fletcher nipped my arm--and out from the shadows

behind the packing-case a little bent figure arose!

I started violently, for I had had no idea that another was in the

room. The apparition proved to be a Chinaman, and judging from what I

could see of him, a very old Chinaman, his bent figure attired in a

blue smock. His eyes were almost invisible amidst an intricate map of

wrinkles which covered his yellow face.

"Evening, John," said Fletcher--and, pulling me with him, he made for

the head of the steps.

As I came abreast of the packing-case, the Chinaman lifted the lamp

and directed its light fully upon my face.

Great as was the faith which I reposed in my make-up, a doubt and a

tremor disturbed me now, as I found myself thus scrutinized by those

cunning old eyes looking out from the mask-like, apish face. For the

first time the Chinaman spoke.

"You blinger fliend, Charlie?" he squeaked in a thin, piping voice.

"Him play piecee card," replied Fletcher briefly. "Good fellow, plenty

much money."

He descended the steps, still holding my arm, and I perforce followed

him. Apparently John's scrutiny and Fletcher's explanation respecting

me, together had proved satisfactory; for the lamp was replaced upon

the lid of the packing-case, and the little bent figure dropped down

again into the shadows from which it had emerged.

"Allee lightee," I heard faintly as I stumbled downward in the wake

of Fletcher.

I had expected to find myself in a cellar, but instead discovered that

we were in a small square court with the mist of the night about us

again. On a doorstep facing us stood a duplicate of the lamp upon the

box upstairs. Evidently this was designed to indicate the portals of

the Joy-Shop, for Fletcher pushed open the door, whose threshold

accommodated the lamp, and the light of the place beyond shone out

into our faces. We entered and my companion closed the door behind us.

Before me I perceived a long low room lighted by flaming gas-burners,

the jets hissing and spluttering in the draught from the door, for

they were entirely innocent of shades or mantles. Wooden tables,

their surfaces stained with the marks of countless wet glasses, were

ranged about the place, café fashion; and many of these tables

accommodated groups, of nondescript nationality for the most part.

One or two there were in a distant corner who were unmistakably

Chinamen; but my slight acquaintance with the races of the East did

not enable me to classify the greater number of those whom I now saw

about me. There were several unattractive-looking women present.

Fletcher walked up the center of the place, exchanging nods of

recognition with two hang-dog poker-players, and I was pleased to note

that our advent had apparently failed to attract the slightest

attention. Through an opening on the right-hand side of the room, near

the top, I looked into a smaller apartment, occupied exclusively by

Chinese. They were playing some kind of roulette and another game

which seemed wholly to absorb their interest. I ventured no more than

a glance, then passed on with my companion.

"\_Fan-tan!\_" he whispered in my ear.

Other forms of gambling were in progress at some of the tables; and

now Fletcher silently drew my attention to yet a third dimly lighted

apartment--this opening out from the left-hand corner of the

principal room. The atmosphere of the latter was sufficiently

abominable; indeed, the stench was appalling; but a wave of choking

vapor met me as I paused for a moment at the threshold of this inner

sanctuary. I formed but the vaguest impression of its interior; the

smell was sufficient. This annex was evidently reserved for

opium-smokers.

Fletcher sat down at a small table near by, and I took a common wooden

chair which he thrust forward with his foot. I was looking around at

the sordid scene, filled with a bitter sense of my own impotency to

aid my missing friend, when that occurred which set my heart beating

wildly at once with hope and excitement. Fletcher must have seen

something of this in my attitude, for--

"Don't forget what I told you," he whispered. "Be cautious!--be very

cautious!..."

CHAPTER VIII

ZARMI OF THE JOY-SHOP

Down the center of the room came a girl carrying the only ornamental

object which thus far I had seen in the Joy-Shop; a large Oriental

brass tray. She was a figure which must have formed a center of

interest in any place, trebly so, then, in such a place as this. Her

costume consisted in a series of incongruities, whilst the entire

effect was barbaric and by no means unpicturesque. She wore high-heeled

red slippers, and, as her short gauzy skirt rendered amply evident,

black silk stockings. A brilliantly colored Oriental scarf was wound

around her waist and knotted in front, its tasseled ends swinging

girdle fashion. A sort of chemise--like the \_'anteree\_ of Egyptian

women--completed her costume, if I except a number of barbaric

ornaments, some of them of silver, with which her hands and arms

were bedecked.

But strange as was the girl's attire, it was to her face that my gaze

was drawn irresistibly. Evidently, like most of those around us, she

was some kind of half-caste; but, unlike them, she was wickedly

handsome. I use the adverb \_wickedly\_ with deliberation; for the

pallidly dusky, oval face, with the full red lips, between which rested

a large yellow cigarette, and the half-closed almond-shaped eyes,

possessed a beauty which might have appealed to an artist of one of

the modern perverted schools, but which filled me less with admiration

than horror. For I \_knew\_ her--I recognized her, from a past, brief

meeting; I knew her, beyond all possibility of doubt, to be one of

the Si-Fan group!

This strange creature, tossing back her jet-black, frizzy hair, which

was entirely innocent of any binding or ornament, advanced along the

room towards us, making unhesitatingly for our table, and carrying her

lithe body with the grace of a \_Gházeeyeh\_.

I glanced at Fletcher across the table.

"Zarmi!" he whispered.

Again I raised my eyes to the face which now was close to mine, and

became aware that I was trembling with excitement....

Heavens! why did enlightenment come too late! Either I was the victim

of an odd delusion, or Zarmi had been the driver of the cab in which

Nayland Smith had left the New Louvre Hotel!

Zarmi place the brass tray upon the table and bent down, resting her

elbows upon it, her hands upturned and her chin nestling in her palms.

The smoke from the cigarette, now held in her fingers, mingled with

her disheveled hair. She looked fully into my face, a long, searching

look; then her lips parted in the slow, voluptuous smile of the

Orient. Without moving her head she turned the wonderful eyes (rendered

doubly luminous by the \_kohl\_ with which her lashes and lids were

darkened) upon Fletcher.

"What you and your strong friend drinking?" she said softly.

Her voice possessed a faint husky note which betrayed her Eastern

parentage, yet it had in it the siren lure which is the ancient

heritage of the Eastern woman--a heritage more ancient than the tribe

of the \_Ghâzeeyeh\_, to one of whom I had mentally likened Zarmi.

"Same thing," replied Fletcher promptly; and raising his hand, he

idly toyed with a huge gold ear-ring which she wore.

Still resting her elbows upon the table and bending down between us,

Zarmi turned her slumbering, half-closed black eyes again upon me,

then slowly, languishingly, upon Fletcher. She replaced the yellow

cigarette between her lips. He continued to toy with the ear-ring.

Suddenly the girl sprang upright, and from its hiding-place within

the silken scarf, plucked out a Malay \_krîs\_ with a richly jeweled

hilt. Her eyes now widely opened and blazing, she struck at my

companion!

I half rose from my chair, stifling a cry of horror; but Fletcher,

regarding her fixedly, never moved ... and Zarmi stayed her hand just

as the point of the dagger had reached his throat!

"You see," she whispered softly but intensely, "how soon I can kill

you."

Ere I had overcome the amazement and horror with which her action

had filled me, she had suddenly clutched me by the shoulder, and,

turning from Fletcher, had the point of the \_krîs\_ at \_my\_ throat!

"You, too!" she whispered, "you too!"

Lower and lower she bent, the needle point of the weapon pricking my

skin, until her beautiful, evil face almost touched mine. Then,

miraculously, the fire died out of her eyes; they half closed again

and became languishing, luresome \_Ghâzeeyeh\_ eyes. She laughed softly,

wickedly, and puffed cigarette smoke into my face.

Thrusting her dagger into her waist-belt, and snatching up the brass

tray, she swayed down the room, chanting some barbaric song in her

husky Eastern voice.

I inhaled deeply and glanced across at my companion. Beneath the

make-up with which I had stained my skin, I knew that I had grown

more than a little pale.

"Fletcher!" I whispered, "we are on the eve of a great discovery--that

girl ..."

I broke off, and clutching the table with both hands, sat listening

intently. From the room behind me, the opium-room, whose entrance was

less than two paces from where we sat, came a sound of dragging and

tapping! Slowly, cautiously, I began to turn my head; when a sudden

outburst of simian chattering from the \_fan-tan\_ players drowned that

other sinister sound.

"You heard it, Doctor!" hissed Fletcher.

"The man with the limp!" I said hoarsely; "he is in there! Fletcher!

I am utterly confused. I believe this place to hold the key to the

whole mystery, I believe ..."

Fletcher gave me a warning glance--and, turning anew, I saw Zarmi

approaching with her sinuous gait, carrying two glasses and jug upon

the ornate tray. These she set down upon the table; then stood

spinning the salver cleverly upon the point of her index finger and

watching us through half-closed eyes.

My companion took out some loose coins, but the girl thrust the

proffered payment aside with her disengaged hand, the salver still

whirling upon the upraised finger of the other.

"Presently you pay for drink," she said. "You do something for me--eh?"

"Yep," replied Fletcher nonchalantly, watering the rum in the

tumblers. "What time?"

"Presently I tell you. You stay here. This one a strong feller?"--

indicating myself.

"Sure," drawled Fletcher; "strong as a mule he is."

"All right. I give him one little kiss if he good boy!"

Tossing the tray in the air she caught it, rested its edge upon her

hip, turned, and walked away down the room, puffing her cigarette.

"Listen," I said, bending across the table, "it was Zarmi who drove

the cab that came for Nayland Smith to-day!"

"My God!" whispered Fletcher, "then it was nothing less than the hand

of Providence that brought us here to-night. Yes! I know how you feel,

Doctor!--but we must play our cards as they're dealt to us. We must

wait--wait."

Out from the den of the opium-smokers came Zarmi, one hand resting

upon her hip and the other uplifted, a smoldering yellow cigarette

held between the first and second fingers. With a movement of her

eyes she summoned us to join her, then turned and disappeared again

through the low doorway.

The time for action was arrived--we were to see behind the scenes of

the Joy-Shop! Our chance to revenge poor Smith even if we could not

save him. I became conscious of an inward and suppressed excitement;

surreptitiously I felt the hilt of the Browning pistol in my pocket.

The shadow of the dead Fu-Manchu seemed to be upon me. God! how I

loathed and feared that memory!

"We can make no plans," I whispered to Fletcher, as together we rose

from the table; "we must be guided by circumstance."

In order to enter the little room laden with those sickly opium fumes

we had to lower our heads. Two steps led down into the place, which

was so dark that I hesitated, momentarily, peering about me.

Apparently some four of five persons squatted and lay in the darkness

about me. Some were couched upon rough wooden shelves ranged around

the walls, others sprawled upon the floor, in the center whereof, upon

a small tea-chest, stood a smoky brass lamp. The room and its

occupants alike were indeterminate, sketchy; its deadly atmosphere

seemed to be suffocating me. A sort of choking sound came from one of

the bunks; a vague, obscene murmuring filled the whole place

revoltingly.

Zarmi stood at the further end, her lithe figure silhouetted against

the vague light coming through an open doorway. I saw her raise her

hand, beckoning to us.

Circling around the chest supporting the lamp we crossed the foul

den and found ourselves in a narrow, dim passage-way, but in cleaner

air.

"Come," said Zarmi, extending her long, slim hand to me.

I took it, solely for guidance in the gloom, and she immediately drew

my arm about her waist, leant back against my shoulder and, raising

her pouted red lips, blew a cloud of tobacco smoke fully into my eyes!

Momentarily blinded, I drew back with a muttered exclamation.

Suspecting what I did of this tigerish half-caste, I could almost have

found it in my heart to return her savage pleasantries with interest.

As I raised my hands to my burning eyes, Fletcher uttered a sharp cry

of pain. I turned in time to see the girl touch him lightly on the

neck with the burning tip of her cigarette.

"You jealous, eh, Charlie?" she said. "But I love you, too--see! Come

along, you strong fellers...."

And away she went along the passage, swaying her hips lithely and

glancing back over her shoulders in smiling coquetry.

Tears were still streaming from my eyes when I found myself standing

in a sort of rough shed, stone-paved, and containing a variety of

nondescript rubbish. A lantern stood upon the floor; and beside it ...

The place seemed to be swimming around me, the stone floor to be

heaving beneath my feet....

Beside the lantern stood a wooden chest, some six feet long, and

having strong rope handles at either end. Evidently the chest had but

recently been nailed up. As Zarmi touched it lightly with the pointed

toe of her little red slipper I clutched at Fletcher for support.

Fletcher grasped my arm in a vice-like grip. To him, too, had come

the ghastly conviction--the gruesome thought that neither of us dared

to name.

It was Nayland Smith's coffin that we were to carry!

"Through here," came dimly to my ears, "and then I tell you what to

do...."

Coolness returned to me, suddenly, unaccountably. I doubted not for an

instant that the best friend I had in the world lay dead there at the

feet of the hellish girl who called herself Zarmi, and I knew since it

was she, disguised, who had driven him to his doom, that she must have

been actively concerned in his murder.

But, I argued, although the damp night air was pouring in through the

door which Zarmi now held open, although sound of Thames-side activity

came stealing to my ears, we were yet within the walls of the Joy-Shop,

with a score or more Asiatic ruffians at the woman's beck and call....

With perfect truth I can state that I retain not even a shadowy

recollection of aiding Fletcher to move the chest out on to the brink

of the cutting--for it was upon this that the door directly opened.

The mist had grown denser, and except a glimpse of slowly moving water

beneath me, I could discern little of our surrounding.

So much I saw by the light of a lantern which stood in the stern of a

boat. In the bows of this boat I was vaguely aware of the presence of

a crouched figure enveloped in rugs--vaguely aware that two filmy

eyes regarded me out of the darkness. A man who looked like a lascar

stood upright in the stern.

I must have been acting like a man in a stupor; for I was aroused to

the realities by the contact of a burning cigarette with the lobe of

my right ear!

"Hurry, quick, strong feller!" said Zarmi softly.

At that it seemed as though some fine nerve of my brain, already

strained to utmost tension, snapped. I turned, with a wild,

inarticulate cry, my fists raised frenziedly above my head.

"You fiend!" I shrieked at the mocking Eurasian, "you yellow fiend of

hell!"

I was beside myself, insane. Zarmi fell back a step, flashing a glance

from my own contorted face to that, now pale even beneath its artificial

tan, of Fletcher.

I snatched the pistol from my pocket, and for one fateful moment the

lust of slaying claimed my mind.... Then I turned towards the river,

and, raising the Browning, fired shot after shot in the air.

"Weymouth!" I cried. "Weymouth!"

A sharp hissing sound came from behind me; a short, muffled cry ...

and something descended, crushing, upon my skull. Like a wild cat

Zarmi hurled herself past me and leapt into the boat. One glimpse I

had of her pallidly dusky face, of her blazing black eyes, and the

boat was thrust off into the waterway ... was swallowed up in the mist.

I turned, dizzily, to see Fletcher sinking to his knees, one hand

clutching his breast.

"She got me ... with the knife," he whispered. "But ... don't worry ...

look to yourself, and ...\_him\_...."

He pointed, weakly--then collapsed at my feet. I threw myself upon

the wooden chest with a fierce, sobbing cry.

"Smith, Smith!" I babbled, and knew myself no better, in my sorrow,

than an hysterical woman. "Smith, dear old man! speak to me! speak

to me!..."

Outraged emotion overcame me utterly, and with my arms thrown across

the box, I slipped into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX

FU-MANCHU

Many poignant recollections are mine, more of them bitter than sweet;

but no one of them all can compare with the memory of that moment of

my awakening.

Weymouth was supporting me, and my throat still tingled from the

effects of the brandy which he had forced between my teeth from his

flask. My heart was beating irregularly; my mind yet partly inert.

With something compound of horror and hope I lay staring at one who

was anxiously bending over the Inspector's shoulder, watching me.

\_It was Nayland Smith.\_

A whole hour of silence seemed to pass, ere speech became possible;

then--

"Smith!" I whispered, "are you ..."

Smith grasped my outstretched, questing hand, grasped it firmly,

warmly; and I saw his gray eyes to be dim in the light of the several

lanterns around us.

"Am I alive?" he said. "Dear old Petrie! Thanks to you, I am not only

alive, but free!"

My head was buzzing like a hive of bees, but I managed, aided by

Weymouth, to struggle to my feet. Muffled sounds of shouting and

scuffling reached me. Two men in the uniform of the Thames Police were

carrying a limp body in at the low doorway communicating with the

infernal Joy-Shop.

"It's Fletcher," said Weymouth, noting the anxiety expressed in my

face. "His missing lady friend has given him a nasty wound, but he'll

pull round all right."

"Thank God for that," I replied, clutched my aching head. "I don't

know what weapon she employed in my case, but it narrowly missed

achieving her purpose."

My eyes, throughout, were turned upon Smith, for his presence there,

still seemed to me miraculous.

"Smith," I said, "for Heaven's sake enlighten me! I never doubted

that you were ..."

"In the wooden chest!" concluded Smith grimly, "Look!"

He pointed to something that lay behind me. I turned, and saw the box

which had occasioned me such anguish. The top had been wrenched off

and the contents exposed to view. It was filled with a variety of gold

ornaments, cups, vases, silks, and barbaric brocaded raiment; it might

well have contained the loot of a cathedral. Inspector Weymouth

laughed gruffly at my surprise.

"What is it?" I asked, in a voice of amazement.

"It's the treasure of the Si-Fan, I presume," rapped Smith. "Where it

has come from and where it was going to, it must be my immediate

business to ascertain."

"Then you ..."

"I was lying, bound and gagged, upon one of the upper shelves in the

opium-den! I heard you and Fletcher arrive. I saw you pass through

later with that she-devil who drove the cab to-day ..."

"Then the cab ..."

"The windows were fastened, unopenable, and some anaesthetic was

injected into the interior through a tube--that speaking-tube. I know

nothing further, except that our plans must have leaked out in some

mysterious fashion. Petrie, my suspicions point to high quarters. The

Si-Fan score thus far, for unless the search now in progress brings

it to light, we must conclude that they have the brass coffer."

He was interrupted by a sudden loud crying of his name.

"Mr. Nayland Smith!" came from somewhere within the Joy-Shop. "This

way, sir!"

Off he went, in his quick, impetuous manner, whilst I stood there,

none too steadily, wondering what discovery this outcry portended.

I had not long to wait. Out by the low doorway come Smith, a grimly

triumphant smile upon his face, carrying the missing brass coffer!

He set it down upon the planking before me.

"John Ki," he said, "who was also on the missing list, had dragged

the thing out of the cellar where it was hidden, and in another minute

must have slipped away with it. Detective Deacon saw the light shining

through a crack in the floor. I shall never forget the look John gave

us when we came upon him, as, lamp in hand, he bent over the precious

chest."

"Shall you open it now?"

"No." He glanced at me oddly. "I shall have it valued in the morning

by Messrs. Meyerstein."

He was keeping something back; I was sure of it.

"Smith," I said suddenly, "the man with the limp! I heard him in the

place where you were confined! Did you ..."

Nayland Smith clicked his teeth together sharply, looking straightly

and grimly into my eyes.

"I \_saw\_ him!" he replied slowly; "and unless the effects of the

anaesthetic had not wholly worn off ..."

"Well!" I cried.

"The man with the limp is \_Dr. Fu-Manchu!\_"

CHAPTER X

THE TÛLUN-NÛR CHEST

"This box," said Mr. Meyerstein, bending attentively over the carven

brass coffer upon the table, "is certainly of considerable value, and

possibly almost unique."

Nayland Smith glanced across at me with a slight smile. Mr. Meyerstein

ran one fat finger tenderly across the heavily embossed figures, which,

like barnacles, encrusted the sides and lid of the weird curio which

we had summoned him to appraise.

"What do you think, Lewison?" he added, glancing over his shoulder at

the clerk who accompanied him.

Lewison, whose flaxen hair and light blue eyes almost served to mask

his Semitic origin, shrugged his shoulders in a fashion incongruous

in one of his complexion, though characteristic in one of his name.

"It is as you say, Mr. Meyerstein, an example of early Tûlun-Nûr

work," he said. "It may be sixteenth century or even earlier. The

Kûren treasure-chest in the Hague Collection has points of

similarity, but the workmanship of this specimen is infinitely finer."

"In a word, gentlemen," snapped Nayland Smith, rising from the

arm-chair in which he had been sitting, and beginning restlessly to

pace the room, "in a word, you would be prepared to make me a

substantial offer for this box?"

Mr. Meyerstein, his shrewd eyes twinkling behind the pebbles of his

pince-nez, straightened himself slowly, turned in the ponderous manner

of a fat man, and readjusted the pince-nez upon his nose. He cleared

his throat.

"I have not yet seen the interior of the box, Mr. Smith," he said.

Smith paused in his perambulation of the carpet and stared hard at

the celebrated art dealer.

"Unfortunately," he replied, "the key is missing."

"Ah!" cried the assistant, Lewison, excitedly, "you are mistaken, sir!

Coffers of this description and workmanship are nearly always

complicated conjuring tricks; they rarely open by any such rational

means as lock and key. For instance, the Kûren treasure-chest to

which I referred, opens by an intricate process involving the pressing

of certain knobs in the design, and the turning of others."

"It was ultimately opened," said Mr. Meyerstein, with a faint note of

professional envy in his voice, "by one of Christie's experts."

"Does my memory mislead me," I interrupted, "or was it not regarding

the possession of the chest to which you refer, that the celebrated

case of 'Hague versus Jacobs' arose?"

"You are quite right, Dr. Petrie," said Meyerstein, turning to me.

"The original owner, a member of the Younghusband Expedition, had been

unable to open the chest. When opened at Christie's it proved to

contain jewels and other valuables. It was a curious case, wasn't it,

Lewison?" turning to his clerk.

"Very," agreed the other absently; then--"Have you endeavored to open

this box, Mr. Smith?"

Nayland Smith shook his head grimly.

"From its weight," said Meyerstein, "I am inclined to think that the

contents might prove of interest. With your permission I will

endeavor to open it."

Nayland Smith, tugging reflectively at the lobe of his left ear, stood

looking at the expert. Then--

"I do not care to attempt it at present," he said.

Meyerstein and his clerk stared at the speaker in surprise.

"But you would be mad," cried the former, "if you accepted an offer for

the box, whilst ignorant of the nature of its contents."

"But I have invited no offer," said Smith. "I do not propose to sell."

Meyerstein adjusted his pince-nez again.

"I am a business man," he said, "and I will make a business proposal:

A hundred guineas for the box, cash down, and our commission to be ten

per cent on the proceeds of the contents. You must remember," raising

a fat forefinger to check Smith, who was about to interrupt him, "that

it may be necessary to force the box in order to open it, thereby

decreasing its market value and making it a bad bargain at a hundred

guineas."

Nayland Smith met my gaze across the room; again a slight smile

crossed the lean, tanned face.

"I can only reply, Mr. Meyerstein," he said, "in this way: if I desire

to place the box on the market, you shall have first refusal, and the

same applies to the contents, if any. For the moment if you will send

me a note of your fee, I shall be obliged." He raised his hand with a

conclusive gesture. "I am not prepared to discuss the question of sale

any further at present, Mr. Meyerstein."

At that the dealer bowed, took up his hat from the table, and prepared

to depart. Lewison opened the door and stood aside.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Meyerstein.

As Lewison was about to follow him--

"Since you do not intend to open the box," he said, turning, his hand

upon the door knob, "have you any idea of its contents?"

"None," replied Smith; "but with my present inadequate knowledge of

its history, I do not care to open it."

Lewison smiled skeptically.

"Probably you know best," he said, bowed to us both, and retired.

When the door was closed--

"You see, Petrie," said Smith, beginning to stuff tobacco into his

briar, "if we are ever short of funds, here's something"--pointing to

the Tûlun-Nûr box upon the table--"which would retrieve our fallen

fortunes."

He uttered one of his rare, boyish laughs, and began to pace the

carpet again, his gaze always set upon our strange treasure. What did

it contain?

The manner in which it had come into our possession suggested that it

might contain something of the utmost value to the Yellow group. For

we knew the house of John Ki to be, if not the head-quarters, certainly

a meeting-place of the mysterious organization the Si-Fan; we knew

that Dr. Fu-Manchu used the place--Dr. Fu-Manchu, the uncanny being

whose existence seemingly proved him immune from natural laws, a

deathless incarnation of evil.

My gaze set upon the box, I wondered anew what strange, dark secrets

it held; I wondered how many murders and crimes greater than murder

blackened its history.

"Smith," I said suddenly, "now that the mystery of the absence of a

key-hole is explained, I am sorely tempted to essay the task of

opening the coffer. I think it might help us to a solution of the

whole mystery."

"And I think otherwise!" interrupted my friend grimly. "In a word,

Petrie, I look upon this box as a sort of hostage by means of which--

who knows--we might one day buy our lives from the enemy.

I have a sort of fancy, call it superstition if you will, that

nothing--not even our miraculous good luck--could save us if once

we ravished its secret."

I stared at him amazedly; this was a new phase in his character.

"I am conscious of something almost like a spiritual unrest," he

continued. "Formerly you were endowed with a capacity for divining

the presence of Fu-Manchu or his agents. Some such second-sight would

appear to have visited me now, and it directs me forcibly to avoid

opening the box."

His steps as he paced the floor grew more and more rapid. He

relighted his pipe, which had gone out as usual, and tossed the

match-end into the hearth.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall lodge the coffer in a place of greater

security. Come along, Petrie, Weymouth is expecting us at Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER XI

IN THE FOG

"But, Smith," I began, as my friend hurried me along the corridor, "you

are not going to leave the box unguarded?"

Nayland Smith tugged at my arm, and, glancing at him, I saw him

frowningly shake his head. Utterly mystified, I nevertheless

understood that for some reason he desired me to preserve silence for

the present. Accordingly I said no more until the lift brought us down

into the lobby and we had passed out from the New Louvre Hotel,

crossed the busy thoroughfare and entered the buffet of an

establishment not far distant. My friend having ordered cocktails--

"And now perhaps you will explain to me the reason for your mysterious

behavior?" said I.

Smith, placing my glass before me, glanced about him to right and left,

and having satisfied himself that his words could not be overheard--

"Petrie," he whispered, "I believe we are spied upon at the New Louvre."

"What!"

"There are spies of the Si-Fan--of Fu-Manchu--amongst the hotel

servants! We have good reason to believe that Dr. Fu-Manchu at one

time was actually in the building, and we have been compelled to draw

attention to the state of the electric fitting in our apartments, which

enables any one in the corridor above to spy upon us."

"Then why do you stay?"

"For a very good reason, Petrie, and the same that prompts me to

retain the Tûlun-Nûr box in my own possession rather than to deposit

it in the strong-room of my bank."

"I begin to understand."

"I trust you do, Petrie; it is fairly obvious. Probably the plan is a

perilous one, but I hope, by laying myself open to attack, to

apprehend the enemy--perhaps to make an important capture."

Setting down my glass, I stared in silence at Smith.

"I will anticipate your remark," he said, smiling dryly. "I am aware

that I am not entitled to expose \_you\_ to these dangers. It is \_my\_

duty and I must perform it as best I can; you, as a volunteer, are

perfectly entitled to withdraw."

As I continued silently to stare at him, his expression changed; the

gray eyes grew less steely, and presently, clapping his hand upon my

shoulder in his impulsive way--

"Petrie!" he cried, "you know I had no intention of hurting your

feelings, but in the circumstances it was impossible for me to say less."

"You have said enough, Smith," I replied shortly. "I beg of you to say

no more."

He gripped my shoulder hard, then plunged his hand into his pocket and

pulled out the blackened pipe.

"We see it through together, then, though God knows whither it will

lead us."

"In the first place," I interrupted, "since you have left the chest

unguarded----"

"I locked the door."

"What is a mere lock where Fu-Manchu is concerned?"

Nayland Smith laughed almost gaily.

"Really, Petrie," he cried, "sometimes I cannot believe that you mean

me to take you seriously. Inspector Weymouth has engaged the room

immediately facing our door, and no one can enter or leave the suite

unseen by him."

"Inspector Weymouth?"

"Oh! for once he has stooped to a disguise: spectacles, and a muffler

which covers his face right up to the tip of his nose. Add to this a

prodigious overcoat and an asthmatic cough, and you have a picture of

Mr. Jonathan Martin, the occupant of room No. 239."

I could not repress a smile upon hearing this description.

"No. 239," continued Smith, "contains two beds, and Mr. Martin's

friend will be joining him there this evening."

Meeting my friend's questioning glance, I nodded comprehendingly.

"Then what part do \_I\_ play?"

"Ostensibly we both leave town this evening," he explained; "but I

have a scheme whereby you will be enabled to remain behind. We shall

thus have one watcher inside and two out."

"It seems almost absurd," I said incredulously, "to expect any member

of the Yellow group to attempt anything in a huge hotel like the New

Louvre, here in the heart of London!"

Nayland Smith, having lighted his pipe, stretched his arms and stared

me straight in the face.

"Has Fu-Manchu never attempted outrage, murder, in the heart of London

before?" he snapped.

The words were sufficient. Remembering black episodes of the past (one

at least of them had occurred not a thousand yards from the very spot

upon which we now stood), I knew that I had spoken folly.

Certain arrangements were made then, including a visit to Scotland

Yard; and a plan--though it sounds anomalous--at once elaborate and

simple, was put into execution in the dusk of the evening.

London remained in the grip of fog, and when we passed along the

corridor communicating with our apartments, faint streaks of yellow

vapor showed in the light of the lamp suspended at the further end.

I knew that Nayland Smith suspected the presence of some spying

contrivance in our rooms, although I was unable to conjecture how this

could have been managed without the connivance of the management. In

pursuance of his idea, however, he extinguished the lights a moment

before we actually quitted the suite. Just within the door he helped

me to remove the somewhat conspicuous check traveling-coat which I

wore. With this upon his arm he opened the door and stepped out into

the corridor.

As the door slammed upon his exit, I heard him cry: "Come along,

Petrie! we have barely five minutes to catch our train."

Detective Carter of New Scotland Yard had joined him at the threshold,

and muffled up in the gray traveling-coat was now hurrying with Smith

along the corridor and out of the hotel. Carter, in build and features,

was not unlike me, and I did not doubt that any one who might be

spying upon our movements would be deceived by this device.

In the darkness of the apartment I stood listening to the retreating

footsteps in the corridor. A sense of loneliness and danger assailed

me. I knew that Inspector Weymouth was watching and listening from the

room immediately opposite; that he held Smith's key; that I could

summon him to my assistance, if necessary, in a matter of seconds.

Yet, contemplating the vigil that lay before me in silence and

darkness, I cannot pretend that my frame of mind was buoyant. I could

not smoke; I must make no sound.

As pre-arranged, I cautiously removed my boots, and as cautiously

tiptoed across the carpet and seated myself in an arm-chair. I

determined there to await the arrival of Mr. Jonathan Martin's friend,

which I knew could not now be long delayed.

The clocks were striking eleven when he arrived, and in the perfect

stillness of that upper corridor. I heard the bustle which heralded

his approach, heard the rap upon the door opposite, followed by a

muffled "Come in" from Weymouth. Then, as the door was opened, I heard

the sound of a wheezy cough.

A strange cracked voice (which, nevertheless, I recognized for Smith's)

cried, "Hullo, Martin!--cough no better?"

Upon that the door was closed again, and as the retreating footsteps

of the servant died away, complete silence--that peculiar silence

which comes with fog--descended once more upon the upper part of the

New Louvre Hotel.

CHAPTER XII

THE VISITANT

That first hour of watching, waiting, and listening in the lonely

quietude passed drearily; and with the passage of every quarter--

signalized by London's muffled clocks--my mood became increasingly

morbid. I peopled the silent rooms opening out of that wherein I sat,

with stealthy, murderous figures; my imagination painted hideous

yellow faces upon the draperies, twitching yellow hands protruding

from this crevice and that. A score of times I started nervously,

thinking I heard the pad of bare feet upon the floor behind me, the

suppressed breathing of some deathly approach.

Since nothing occurred to justify these tremors, this apprehensive

mood passed; I realized that I was growing cramped and stiff, that

unconsciously I had been sitting with my muscles nervously tensed.

The window was open a foot or so at the top and the blind was drawn;

but so accustomed were my eyes now to peering through the darkness,

that I could plainly discern the yellow oblong of the window, and

though very vaguely, some of the appointments of the room--the

Chesterfield against one wall, the lamp-shade above my head, the

table with the Tûlun-Nûr box upon it.

There was fog in the room, and it was growing damply chill, for we

had extinguished the electric heater some hours before. Very few

sounds penetrated from outside. Twice or perhaps thrice people passed

along the corridor, going to their rooms; but, as I knew, the greater

number of the rooms along that corridor were unoccupied.

From the Embankment far below me, and from the river, faint noises

came at long intervals it is true; the muffled hooting of motors, and

yet fainter ringing of bells. Fog signals boomed distantly, and train

whistles shrieked, remote and unreal. I determined to enter my bedroom,

and, risking any sound which I might make, to lie down upon the bed.

I rose carefully and carried this plan into execution. I would have

given much for a smoke, although my throat was parched; and almost any

drink would have been nectar. But although my hopes (or my fears) of

an intruder had left me, I determined to stick to the rules of the

game as laid down. Therefore I neither smoked nor drank, but carefully

extended my weary limbs upon the coverlet, and telling myself that I

could guard our strange treasure as well from there as from elsewhere

... slipped off into a profound sleep.

Nothing approaching in acute and sustained horror to the moment when

next I opened my eyes exists in all my memories of those days.

In the first place I was aroused by the shaking of the bed. It was

quivering beneath me as though an earthquake disturbed the very

foundations of the building. I sprang upright and into full

consciousness of my lapse.... My hands clutching the coverlet on

either side of me, I sat staring, staring, staring ... at \_that\_ which

peered at me over the foot of the bed.

I knew that I had slept at my post; I was convinced that I was now

widely awake; yet I \_dared\_ not admit to myself that what I saw was

other than a product of my imagination. I dared not admit the physical

quivering of the bed, for I could not, with sanity, believe its cause

to be anything human. But what I saw, yet could not credit seeing,

was this:

A ghostly white face, which seemed to glisten in some faint reflected

light from the sitting-room beyond, peered over the bedrail; gibbered

at me demoniacally. With quivering hands this night-mare horror, which

had intruded where I believed human intrusion to be all but impossible,

clutched the bed-posts so that the frame of the structure shook and

faintly rattled....

My heart leapt wildly in my breast, then seemed to suspend its

pulsations and to grow icily cold. My whole body became chilled

horrifically. My scalp tingled: I felt that I must either cry out or

become stark, raving mad!

For this clammily white face, those staring eyes, that wordless

gibbering, and the shaking, shaking, shaking of the bed in the clutch

of the nameless visitant--prevailed, refused to disperse like the evil

dream I had hoped it all to be; manifested itself, indubitably, as

something tangible--objective....

Outraged reason deprived me of coherent speech. Past the clammy white

face I could see the sitting-room illuminated by a faint light; I

could even see the Tûlun-Nûr box upon the table immediately opposite

the door.

The thing which shook the bed was actual, existent--to be counted with!

Further and further I drew myself away from it, until I crouched close

up against the head of the bed. Then, as the thing reeled aside, and--

merciful Heaven!--made as if to come around and approach me yet closer,

I uttered a hoarse cry and hurled myself out upon the floor and on the

side remote from that pallid horror which I thought was pursuing me.

I heard a dull thud ... and the thing disappeared from my view, yet--

and remembering the supreme terror of that visitation I am not ashamed

to confess it--I dared not move from the spot upon which I stood, I

dared not make to pass that which lay between me and the door.

"Smith!" I cried, but my voice was little more than a hoarse whisper--

"Smith! Weymouth!"

The words became clearer and louder as I proceeded, so that the last--

"Weymouth!"--was uttered in a sort of falsetto scream.

A door burst open upon the other side of the corridor. A key was

inserted in the lock of the door. Into the dimly lighted arch which

divided the bed-room from the sitting-room, sprang the figure of

Nayland Smith!

"Petrie! Petrie!" he called--and I saw him standing there looking from

left to right.

Then, ere I could reply, he turned, and his gaze fell upon whatever

lay upon the floor at the foot of the bed.

"My God!" he whispered--and sprang into the room.

"Smith! Smith!" I cried, "what is it? what is it?"

He turned in a flash, as Weymouth entered at his heels, saw me, and

fell back a step; then looked again down at the floor.

"God's mercy!" he whispered, "I thought it was you--I thought it was

you!"

Trembling violently, my mind a feverish chaos, I moved to the foot of

the bed and looked down at what lay there.

"Turn up the light!" snapped Smith.

Weymouth reached for the switch, and the room became illuminated

suddenly.

Prone upon the carpet, hands outstretched and nails dug deeply into

the pile of the fabric, lay a dark-haired man having his head twisted

sideways so that the face showed a ghastly pallid profile against the

rich colorings upon which it rested. He wore no coat, but a sort of

dark gray shirt and black trousers. To add to the incongruity of his

attire, his feet were clad in drab-colored shoes, rubber-soled.

I stood, one hand raised to my head, looking down upon him, and

gradually regaining control of myself. Weymouth, perceiving something

of my condition, silently passed his flask to me; and I gladly availed

myself of this.

"How in Heaven's name did he get in?" I whispered.

"How, indeed!" said Weymouth, staring about him with wondering eyes.

Both he and Smith had discarded their disguises; and, a bewildered

trio, we stood looking down upon the man at our feet. Suddenly Smith

dropped to his knees and turned him flat upon his back. Composure was

nearly restored to me, and I knelt upon the other side of the

white-faced creature whose presence there seemed so utterly outside

the realm of possibility, and examined him with a consuming and fearful

interest; for it was palpable that, if not already dead, he was dying

rapidly.

He was a slightly built man, and the first discovery that I made was

a curious one. What I had mistaken for dark hair was a wig! The short

black mustache which he wore was also factitious.

"Look at this!" I cried.

"I am looking," snapped Smith.

He suddenly stood up, and entering the room beyond, turned on the

light there. I saw him staring at the Tûlun-Nûr box, and I knew what

had been in his mind. But the box, undisturbed, stood upon the table

as we had left it. I saw Smith tugging irritably at the lobe of his

ear, and staring from the box towards the man beside whom I knelt.

"For God's sake, what does it man?" said Inspector Weymouth in a voice

hushed with wonder. "How did he get in? What did he come for?--and

what has happened to him?"

"As to what has happened to him," I replied, "unfortunately I cannot

tell you. I only know that unless something can be done his end is not

far off."

"Shall we lay him on the bed?"

I nodded, and together we raised the slight figure and placed it upon

the bed where so recently I had lain.

As we did so, the man suddenly opened his eyes, which were glazed with

delirium. He tore himself from our grip, sat bolt upright, and

holding his hands, fingers outstretched, before his face, stared at

them frenziedly.

"The golden pomegranates!" he shrieked, and a slight froth appeared on

his blanched lips. "The golden pomegranates!"

He laughed madly, and fell back inert.

"He's dead!" whispered Weymouth; "he's dead!"

Hard upon his words came a cry from Smith:

"Quick! Petrie!--Weymouth!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROOM BELOW

I ran into the sitting-room, to discover Nayland Smith craning out of

the now widely opened window. The blind had been drawn up, I did not

know by whom; and, leaning out beside my friend, I was in time to

perceive some bright object moving down the gray stone wall. Almost

instantly it disappeared from sight in the yellow banks below.

Smith leapt around in a whirl of excitement.

"Come in, Petrie!" he cried, seizing my arm. "You remain here,

Weymouth; don't leave these rooms whatever happens!"

We ran out into the corridor. For my own part I had not the vaguest

idea what we were about. My mind was not yet fully recovered from the

frightful shock which it had sustained; and the strange words of the

dying man--"the golden pomegranates"--had increased my mental

confusion. Smith apparently had not heard them, for he remained grimly

silent, as side by side we raced down the marble stairs to the

corridor immediately below our own.

Although, amid the hideous turmoil to which I had awakened, I had

noted nothing of the hour, evidently the night was far advanced. Not a

soul was to be seen from end to end of the vast corridor in which we

stood ... until on the right-hand side and about half-way along, a

door opened and a woman came out hurriedly, carrying a small hand-bag.

She wore a veil, so that her features were but vaguely distinguished,

but her every movement was agitated; and this agitation perceptibly

increased when, turning, she perceived the two of us bearing down

upon her.

Nayland Smith, who had been audibly counting the doors along the

corridor as we passed them, seized the woman's arm without ceremony,

and pulled her into the apartment she had been on the point of

quitting, closing the door behind us as we entered.

"Smith!" I began, "for Heaven's sake what are you about?"

"You shall see, Petrie!" he snapped.

He released the woman's arm, and pointing to an arm-chair near by--

"Be seated," he said sternly.

Speechless with amazement, I stood, with my back to the door, watching

this singular scene. Our captive, who wore a smart walking costume and

whose appearance was indicative of elegance and culture, so far had

uttered no word of protest, no cry.

Now, whilst Smith stood rigidly pointing to the chair, she seated

herself with something very like composure and placed the leather bag

upon the floor beside her. The room in which I found myself was one of

a suite almost identical with our own, but from what I had gathered in

a hasty glance around, it bore no signs of recent tenancy. The window

was widely opened, and upon the floor lay a strange-looking contrivance

apparently made of aluminum. A large grip, open, stood beside it, and

from this some portions of a black coat and other garments protruded.

"Now, madame," said Nayland Smith, "will you be good enough to raise

your veil?"

Silently, unprotestingly, the woman obeyed him, raising her gloved

hands and lifting the veil from her face.

The features revealed were handsome in a hard fashion, but heavily

made-up. Our captive was younger than I had hitherto supposed; a

blonde; her hair artificially reduced to the so-called Titian tint.

But, despite her youth, her eyes, with the blackened lashes, were full

of a world weariness. Now she smiled cynically.

"Are you satisfied," she said, speaking unemotionally, "or," holding

up her wrists, "would you like to handcuff me?"

Nayland Smith, glancing from the open grip and the appliance beside it

to the face of the speaker, began clicking his teeth together, whereby

I knew him to be perplexed. Then he stared across at me.

"You appear bemused, Petrie," he said, with a certain irritation. "Is

this what mystifies you?"

Stooping, he picked up the metal contrivance, and almost savagely

jerked open the top section. It was a telescopic ladder, and more

ingeniously designed than anything of the kind I had seen before.

There was a sort of clamp attached to the base, and two sharply pointed

hooks at the top.

"For reaching windows on an upper floor," snapped my friend, dropping

the thing with a clatter upon the carpet. "An American device which

forms part of the equipment of the modern hotel thief!"

He seemed to be disappointed--fiercely disappointed; and I found his

attitude inexplicable. He turned to the woman--who sat regarding him

with that fixed cynical smile.

"Who are you?" he demanded; "and what business have you with the Si-Fan?"

The woman's eyes opened more widely, and the smile disappeared from

her face.

"The Si-Fan!" she repeated slowly. "I don't know what you mean,

Inspector."

"I am not an Inspector," snapped Smith, "and you know it well enough.

You have one chance--your last. To whom were you to deliver the box?

when and where?"

But the blue eyes remained upraised to the grim tanned face with a

look of wonder in them, which, if assumed, marked the woman a

consummate actress.

"Who are you?" she asked in a low voice, "and what are you talking

about?"

Inactive, I stood by the door watching my friend, and his face was a

fruitful study in perplexity. He seemed upon the point of an angry

outburst, then, staring intently into the questioning eyes upraised

to his, he checked the words he would have uttered and began to click

his teeth together again.

"You are some servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu!" he said.

The girl frowned with a bewilderment which I could have sworn was not

assumed. Then--

"You said I had one chance a moment ago," she replied. "But if you

referred to my answering any of your questions, it is no chance at

all. We have gone under, and I know it. I am not complaining; it's

all in the game. There's a clear enough case against us, and I am

sorry"--suddenly, unexpectedly, her eyes became filled with tears,

which coursed down her cheeks, leaving little wakes of blackness from

the make-up upon her lashes. Her lips trembled, and her voice shook.

"I am sorry I let him do it. He'd never done anything--not anything

big like this--before, and he never would have done if he had not

met me...."

The look of perplexity upon Smith's face was increasing with every

word that the girl uttered.

"You don't seem to know me," she continued, her emotion growing

momentarily greater, "and I don't know you; but they will know me at

Bow Street. I urged him to do it, when he told me about the box to-day

at lunch. He said that if it contained half as much as the Kûren

treasure-chest, we could sail for America and be on the straight all

the rest of our lives...."

And now something which had hitherto been puzzling me became suddenly

evident. I had not removed the wig worn by the dead man, but I knew

that he had fair hair, and when in his last moments he had opened his

eyes, there had been in the contorted face something faintly familiar.

"Smith!" I cried excitedly, "it is Lewison, Meyerstein's clerk! Don't

you understand? don't you understand?"

Smith brought his teeth together with a snap and stared me hard in

the face.

"I do, Petrie. I have been following a false scent. I do!"

The girl in the chair was now sobbing convulsively.

"He was tempted by the possibility of the box containing treasure," I

ran on, "and his acquaintance with this--lady--who is evidently no

stranger to felonious operations, led him to make the attempt with her

assistance. But"--I found myself confronted by a new problem--"what

caused his death?"

"His ... \_death\_!"

As a wild, hysterical shriek the words smote upon my ears. I turned,

to see the girl rise, tottering, from her seat. She began groping in

front of her, blindly, as though a darkness had descended.

"You did not say he was dead?" she whispered, "not dead!--not ..."

The words were lost in a wild peal of laughter. Clutching at her

throat she swayed and would have fallen had I not caught her in my

arms. As I laid her insensible upon the settee I met Smith's glance.

"I think I know that, too, Petrie," he said gravely.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GOLDEN POMEGRANATES

"What was it that he cried out?" demanded Nayland Smith abruptly. "I

was in the sitting-room and it sounded to me like 'pomegranates'!"

We were bending over Lewison; for now, the wig removed, Lewison it

proved unmistakably to be, despite the puffy and pallid face.

"He said 'the golden pomegranates,'" I replied, and laughed harshly.

"They were words of delirium and cannot possibly have any bearing

upon the manner of his death."

"I disagree."

He strode out into the sitting-room.

Weymouth was below, supervising the removal of the unhappy prisoner,

and together Smith and I stood looking down at the brass box. Suddenly--

"I propose to attempt to open it," said my friend.

His words came as a complete surprise.

"For what reason?--and why have you so suddenly changed your mind?"

"For a reason which I hope will presently become evident," he said;

"and as to my change of mind, unless I am greatly mistaken, the wily

old Chinaman from whom I wrested this treasure was infinitely more

clever than I gave him credit for being!"

Through the open window came faintly to my ears the chiming of Big Ben.

The hour was a quarter to two. London's pulse was dimmed now, and

around about us that great city slept as soundly as it ever sleeps.

Other sounds came vaguely through the fog, and beside Nayland Smith

I sat and watched him at work upon the Tûlun-Nûr box.

Every knob of the intricate design he pushed, pulled and twisted; but

without result. The night wore on, and just before three o'clock

Inspector Weymouth knocked upon the door. I admitted him, and side by

side the two of us stood watching Smith patiently pursuing his task.

All conversation had ceased, when, just as the muted booming of

London's clocks reached my ears again and Weymouth pulled out his

watch, there came a faint click ... and I saw that Smith had raised

the lid of the coffer!

Weymouth and I sprang forward with one accord, and over Smith's

shoulders peered into the interior. There was a second lid of some

dull, black wood, apparently of great age, and fastened to it so as

to form knobs or handles was an exquisitely carved pair of \_golden

pomegranates!\_

"They are to raise the wooden lid, Mr. Smith!" cried Weymouth eagerly.

"Look! there is a hollow in each to accommodate the fingers!"

"Aren't you going to open it?" I demanded excitedly--"aren't you going

to open it?"

"Might I invite you to accompany me into the bedroom yonder for a

moment?" he replied in a tome of studied reserve. "You also, Weymouth?"

Smith leading, we entered the room where the dead man lay stretched

upon the bed.

"Note the appearance of his fingers," directed Nayland Smith.

I examined the peculiarity to which Smith had drawn my attention. The

dead man's fingers were swollen extraordinarily, the index finger of

either hand especially being oddly discolored, as though bruised from

the nail upward. I looked again at the ghastly face, then, repressing

a shudder, for the sight was one not good to look upon, I turned to

Smith, who was watching me expectantly with his keen, steely eyes.

From his pocket the took out a knife containing a number of implements,

amongst them a hook-like contrivance.

"Have you a button-hook, Petrie," he asked, "or anything of that nature?"

"How will this do?" said the Inspector, and he produced a pair of

handcuffs. "They were not wanted," he added significantly.

"Better still," declared Smith.

Reclosing his knife, he took the handcuffs from Weymouth, and,

returning to the sitting-room, opened them widely and inserted two

steel points in the hollows of the golden pomegranates. He pulled.

There was a faint sound of moving mechanism and the wooden lid lifted,

revealing the interior of the coffer. It contained three long bars of

lead--and nothing else!

Supporting the lid with the handcuffs--

"Just pull the light over here, Petrie," said Smith.

I did as he directed.

"Look into these two cavities where one is expected to thrust one's

fingers!"

Weymouth and I craned forward so that our heads came into contact.

"My God!" whispered the Inspector, "we know now what killed him!"

Visible, in either little cavity against the edge of the steel

handcuff, was the point of a needle, which evidently worked in an

exquisitely made socket through which the action of raising the lid

caused it to protrude. Underneath the lid, midway between the two

pomegranates, as I saw by slowly moving the lamp, was a little

receptacle of metal communicating with the base of the hollow needles.

The action of lifting the lid not only protruded the points but also

operated the hypodermic syringe!

"Note," snapped Smith--but his voice was slightly hoarse.

He removed the points of the bracelets. The box immediately reclosed

with no other sound than a faint click.

"God forgive him," said Smith, glancing toward the other room, "for

he died in my stead!--and Dr. Fu-Manchu scores an undeserved failure!"

CHAPTER XV

ZARMI REAPPEARS

"Come in!" I cried.

The door opened and a page-boy entered.

"A cable for Dr. Petrie."

I started up from my chair. A thousand possibilities--some of a sort

to bring dread to my heart--instantly occurred to me. I tore open the

envelope and, as one does, glanced first at the name of the sender.

It was signed "Kâramaneh!"

"Smith!" I said hoarsely, glancing over the massage, "Kâramaneh is on

her way to England. She arrives by the \_Nicobar\_ to-morrow!"

"Eh?" cried Nayland Smith, in turn leaping to his feet. "She had no

right to come alone, unless----"

The boy, open-mouthed, was listening to our conversation, and I

hastily thrust a coin into his hand and dismissed him. As the door

closed--

"Unless what, Smith?" I said, looking my friend squarely in the eyes.

"Unless she has learnt something, or--is flying away from some one!"

My mind set in a whirl of hopes and fears, longings and dreads.

"What do you mean, Smith?" I asked. "This is the place of danger, as

we know to our cost; she was safe in Egypt."

Nayland Smith commenced one of his restless perambulations, glancing

at me from time to time and frequently tugging at the lobe of his ear.

"\_Was\_ she safe in Egypt?" he rapped. "We are dealing, remember, with

the Si-Fan, which, if I am not mistaken, is a sort of Eleusinian

Mystery holding some kind of dominion over the eastern mind, and

boasting initiates throughout the Orient. It is almost certain that

there is an Egyptian branch, or group--call it what you will--of the

damnable organization."

"But Dr. Fu-Manchu----"

"Dr. Fu-Manchu--for he lives, Petrie! my own eyes bear witness to the

fact--Dr. Fu-Manchu is a sort of delegate from the headquarters. His

prodigious genius will readily enable him to keep in touch with every

branch of the movement, East and West."

He paused to knock out his pipe into an ashtray and to watch me for

some moments in silence.

"He may have instructed his Cairo agents," he added significantly.

"God grant she get to England in safety," I whispered. "Smith! can we

make no move to round up the devils who defy us, here in the very

heart of civilized England? Listen. You will not have forgotten the

wild-cat Eurasian Zarmi?"

Smith nodded. "I recall the lady perfectly!" he snapped.

"Unless my imagination has been playing me tricks, I have seen her

twice within the last few days--once in the neighborhood of this hotel

and once in a cab in Piccadilly."

"You mentioned the matter at the time," said Smith shortly; "but

although I made inquiries, as you remember, nothing came of them."

"Nevertheless, I don't think I was mistaken. I feel in my very bones

that the Yellow hand of Fu-Manchu is about to stretch out again. If

only we could apprehend Zarmi."

Nayland Smith lighted his pipe with care.

"If only we could, Petrie!" he said; "but, damn it!"--he dashed his

left fist into the palm of his right hand--"we are doomed to remain

inactive. We can only await the arrival of Kâramaneh and see if she

has anything to tell us. I must admit that there are certain theories

of my own which I haven't yet had an opportunity of testing. Perhaps

in the near future such an opportunity may arise."

How soon that opportunity was to arise neither of us suspected then;

but Fate is a merry trickster, and even as we spoke of these matters

events were brewing which were to lead us along strange paths.

With such glad anticipations as my pen cannot describe, their gladness

not unmixed with fear, I retired to rest that night, scarcely

expecting to sleep, so eager was I for the morrow. The musical voice

of Kâramaneh seemed to ring in my ears; I seemed to feel the touch

of her soft hands and to detect, as I drifted into the borderland

betwixt reality and slumber, that faint, exquisite perfume which from

the first moment of my meeting with the beautiful Eastern girl, had

become to me inseparable from her personality.

It seemed that sleep had but just claimed me when I was awakened by

some one roughly shaking my shoulder. I sprang upright, my mind alert

to sudden danger. The room looked yellow and dismal, illuminated as it

was by a cold light of dawn which crept through the window and with

which competed the luminance of the electric lamps.

Nayland Smith stood at my bedside, partially dressed!

"Wake up, Petrie!" he cried; "you instincts serve you better than my

reasoning. Hell's afoot, old man! Even as you predicted it, perhaps in

that same hour, the yellow fiends were at work!"

"What, Smith, what!" I said, leaping out of bed; "you don't mean----"

"Not that, old man," he replied, clapping his hand upon my shoulder;

"there is no further news of \_her\_, but Weymouth is waiting outside.

Sir Baldwin Frazer has disappeared!"

I rubbed my eyes hard and sought to clear my mind of the vapors of

sleep.

"Sir Baldwin Frazer!" I said, "of Half-Moon Street? But what----"

"God knows \_what\_," snapped Smith; "but our old friend Zarmi, or so it

would appear, bore him off last night, and he has completely vanished,

leaving practically no trace behind."

Only a few sleeping servants were about as we descended the marble

stairs to the lobby of the hotel where Weymouth was awaiting us.

"I have a cab outside from the Yard," he said. "I came straight here

to fetch you before going on to Half-Moon Street."

"Quite right!" snapped Smith; "but you are sure the cab is from the

Yard? I have had painful experience of strange cabs recently!"

"You can trust this one," said Weymouth, smiling slightly. "It has

carried me to the scene of many a crime."

"Hem!" said Smith--"a dubious recommendation."

We entered the waiting vehicle and soon were passing through the

nearly deserted streets of London. Only those workers whose toils

began with the dawn were afoot at that early hour, and in the misty

gray light the streets had an unfamiliar look and wore an aspect of

sadness in ill accord with the sentiments which now were stirring

within me. For whatever might be the fate of the famous mental

specialist, whatever the mystery before us--even though Dr. Fu-Manchu

himself, malignantly active, threatened our safety--Kâramaneh would

be with me again that day--Kâramaneh, my beautiful wife to be!

So selfishly occupied was I with these reflections that I paid little

heed to the words of Weymouth, who was acquainting Nayland Smith with

the facts bearing upon the mysterious disappearance of Sir Baldwin

Frazer. Indeed, I was almost entirely ignorant upon the subject when

the cab pulled up before the surgeon's house in Half-Moon Street.

Here, where all else spoke of a city yet sleeping or but newly

awakened, was wild unrest and excitement. Several servants were

hovering about the hall eager to glean any scrap of information that

might be obtainable; wide-eyed and curious, if not a little fearful.

In the somber dining-room with its heavy oak furniture and gleaming

silver, Sir Baldwin's secretary awaited us. He was a young man,

fair-haired, clean-shaven and alert; but a real and ever-present

anxiety could be read in his eyes.

"I am sorry," he began, "to have been the cause of disturbing you at

so early an hour, particularly since this mysterious affair may prove

to have no connection with the matters which I understand are at

present engaging your attention."

Nayland Smith raised his hand deprecatingly.

"We are prepared, Mr. Logan," he replied, "to travel to the uttermost

ends of the earth at all times, if by doing so we can obtain even a

meager clue to the enigma which baffles us."

"I should not have disturbed Mr. Smith," said Weymouth, "if I had not

been pretty sure that there was Chinese devilry at work here: nor

should I have told you as much as I have, Mr. Logan," he added, a

humorous twinkle creeping into his blue eyes, "if I had thought you

could not be of use to us in unraveling our case!"

"I quite understand that," said Logan, "and now, since you have voted

for the story first and refreshments afterward, let me tell you what

little I know of the matter."

"Be as brief as you can," snapped Nayland Smith, starting up from the

chair in which he had been seated and beginning restlessly to pace

the floor before the open fireplace--"as brief as is consistent with

clarity. We have learnt in the past that an hour or less sometimes

means the difference between----"

He paused, glancing at Sir Baldwin's secretary.

"Between life and death," he added.

Mr. Logan started perceptibly.

"You alarm me, Mr. Smith," he declared; "for I can conceive of no

earthly manner in which this mysterious Eastern organization of which

Inspector Weymouth speaks, could profit by the death of Sir Baldwin."

Nayland Smith suddenly turned and stared grimly at the speaker.

"I call it death," he said harshly, "to be carried off to the interior

of China, to be made a mere slave, having no will but the great and

evil man who already--already, mark you!--has actually accomplished

such things."

"But Sir Baldwin----"

"Sir Baldwin Frazer," snapped Smith, "is the undisputed head of his

particular branch of surgery. Dr. Fu-Manchu may have what he deems

useful employment for such skill as his. But," glancing at the clock,

"we are wasting time. Your story, Mr. Logan."

"It was about half-past twelve last night," began the secretary,

closing his eyes as if he were concentrating his mind upon certain

past events, "when a woman came here and inquired for Sir Baldwin.

The butler informed her that Sir Baldwin was entertaining friends and

that he could receive no professional visitors until the morning.

She was so insistent, however, absolutely declining to go away, that

I was sent for--I have rooms in the house--and I came down to interview

her in the library."

"Be very accurate, Mr. Logan," interrupted Smith, "in your description

of this visitor."

"I shall do my best," pursued Logan, closing his eyes again in

concentrated thought. "She wore evening dress, of a fantastic kind,

markedly Oriental in character, and had large gold rings in her ears.

A green embroidered shawl, with raised figures of white birds as a

design, took the place of a cloak. It was certainly of Eastern

workmanship, possibly Arab; and she wore it about her shoulders with

one corner thrown over her head--again, something like a \_burnous\_. She

was extremely dark, had jet-black, frizzy hair and very remarkable

eyes, the finest of their type I have ever seen. She possessed beauty

of a sort, of course, but without being exactly vulgar, it was what I

may term \_ostentatious;\_ and as I entered the library I found myself

at a loss to define her exact place in society--you understand what

I mean?"

We all nodded comprehendingly and awaited with intense interest the

resumption of the story. Mr. Logan had vividly described the Eurasian

Zarmi, the creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"When the woman addressed me," he continued, "my surmise that she was

some kind of half-caste, probably a Eurasian, was confirmed by her

broken English. I shall not be misunderstood"--a slight embarrassment

became perceptible in his manner--"if I say that the visitor quite

openly tried to bewitch me; and since we are all human, you will

perhaps condone my conduct when I add that she succeeded, in a measure,

inasmuch as I consented to speak to Sir Baldwin, although he was

actually playing bridge at the time.

"Either my eloquence, or, to put it bluntly, the extraordinary fee

which the woman offered, resulted in Sir Baldwin's agreeing to abandon

his friends and accompany the visitor in a cab which was waiting to

see the patient."

"And who was the patient?" rapped Smith.

"According to the woman's account, the patient was her mother, who

had met with a street accident a week before. She gave the name of

the consultant who had been called in, and who, she stated, had

advised the opinion of Sir Baldwin. She represented that the matter

was urgent, and that it might be necessary to perform an operation

immediately in order to save the patient's life."

"But surely," I interrupted, in surprise, "Sir Baldwin did not take

his instruments?"

"He took his case with him--yes," replied Logan; "for he in turn

yielded to the appeals of the visitor. The very last words that I

heard him speak as he left the house were to assure her that no such

operation could be undertaken at such short notice in that way."

Logan paused, looking around at us a little wearily.

"And what aroused your suspicions?" said Smith.

"My suspicions were aroused at the very moment of Sir Baldwin's

departure, for as I came out onto the steps with him I noticed a

singular thing."

"And that was?" snapped Smith.

"Directly Sir Baldwin had entered the cab the woman got out," replied

Logan with some excitement in his manner, "and reclosing the door

took her seat beside the driver of the vehicle--which immediately

moved off."

Nayland Smith glanced significantly at me.

"The cab trick again, Petrie!" he said; "scarcely a doubt of it." Then,

to Logan: "Anything else?"

"This," replied the secretary: "I thought, although I could not be

sure, that the face of Sir Baldwin peered out of the window for a

moment as the cab moved away from the house, and that there was

strange expression upon it, almost a look of horror. But of course as

there was no light in the cab and the only illumination was that from

the open door, I could not be sure."

"And now tell Mr. Smith," said Weymouth, "how you got confirmation of

your fears."

"I felt very uneasy in my mind," continued Logan, "for the whole

thing was so irregular, and I could not rid my memory of the idea of

Sir Baldwin's face looking out from the cab window. Therefore I rang

up the consultant whose name our visitor had mentioned."

"Yes?" cried Smith eagerly.

"He knew nothing whatever of the matter," said Logan, "and had no such

case upon his books! That of course put me in a dreadful state of mind,

but I was naturally anxious to avoid making a fool of myself and

therefore I waited for some hours before mentioning my suspicions to

any one. But when the morning came and no message was received I

determined to communicate with Scotland Yard. The rest of the mystery

it is for you, gentlemen, to unravel."

CHAPTER XVI

I TRACK ZARMI

"What does it mean?" said Nayland Smith wearily, looking at me through

the haze of tobacco smoke which lay between us. "A well-known man like

Sir Baldwin Frazer is decoyed away--undoubtedly by the woman Zarmi;

and up to the present moment not so much as a trace of him can be

found. It is mortifying to think that with all the facilities of New

Scotland Yard at our disposal we cannot trace that damnable cab! We

cannot find the headquarters of the group--we cannot \_move!\_ To sit

here inactive whilst Sir Baldwin Frazer--God knows for what purpose!--

is perhaps being smuggled out of the country, is maddening--maddening!"

Then, glancing quickly across to me: "To think ..."

I rose from my chair, head averted. A tragedy had befallen me which

completely overshadowed all other affairs, great and small. Indeed,

its poignancy was not yet come to its most acute stage; the news was

too recent for that. It had numbed my mind; dulled the pulsing life

within me.

The s.s.\_Nicobar\_, of the Oriental Navigation Line, had arrived at

Tilbury at the scheduled time. My heart leaping joyously in my bosom,

I had hurried on board to meet Kâramaneh....

I have sustained some cruel blows in my life; but I can state with

candor that this which now befell me was by far the greatest and the

most crushing I had ever been called upon to bear; a calamity dwarfing

all others which I could imagine.

She had left the ship at Southampton--and had vanished completely.

"Poor old Petrie," said Smith, and clapped his hands upon my shoulders

in his impulsive sympathetic way. "Don't give up hope! We are not

going to be beaten!"

"Smith," I interrupted bitterly, "what chance have we? what chance

have we? We know no more than a child unborn where these people have

their hiding-place, and we haven't a shadow of a clue to guide us to it."

His hands resting upon my shoulders and his gray eyes looking

straightly into mine.

"I can only repeat, old man," said my friend, "don't abandon hope. I

must leave you for an hour or so, and, when I return, possibly I may

have some news."

For long enough after Smith's departure I sat there, companioned only

by wretched reflections; then, further inaction seemed impossible; to

move, to be up and doing, to be seeking, questing, became an

imperative necessity. Muffled in a heavy traveling coat I went out

into the wet and dismal night, having no other plan in mind than that

of walking on through the rain-swept streets, on and always on, in an

attempt, vain enough, to escape from the deadly thoughts that pursued

me.

Without having the slightest idea that I had done so, I must have

walked along the Strand, crossed Trafalgar Square, proceeded up the

Haymarket to Piccadilly Circus, and commenced to trudge along at the

Oriental rugs displayed in Messrs. Liberty's window, when an incident

aroused me from the apathy of sorrow in which I was sunken.

"Tell the cab feller to drive to the north side of Wandsworth Common,"

said a woman's voice--a voice speaking in broken English, a voice

which electrified me, had me alert and watchful in a moment.

I turned, as the speaker, entering a taxi-cab that was drawn up by the

pavement, gave these directions to the door-porter, who with open

umbrella was in attendance. Just one glimpse I had of her as she

stepped into the cab, but it was sufficient. Indeed, the voice had

been sufficient; but that sinuous shape and that lithe swaying movement

of the hips removed all doubt.

It was Zarmi!

As the cab moved off I ran out into the middle of the road, where

there was a rank, and sprang into the first taxi waiting there.

"Follow the cab ahead!" I cried to the man, my voice quivering with

excitement. "Look! you can see the number! There can be no mistake. But

don't lose it for your life! It's worth a sovereign to you!"

The man, warming to my mood, cranked his engine rapidly and sprang to

the wheel. I was wild with excitement now, and fearful lest the cab

ahead should have disappeared; but fortune seemingly was with me for

once, and I was not twenty yards behind when Zarmi's cab turned the

first corner ahead. Through the gloomy street, which appeared to be

populated solely by streaming umbrellas, we went. I could scarcely

keep my seat; every nerve in my body seemed to be dancing--twitching.

Eternally I was peering ahead; and when, leaving the well-lighted West

End thoroughfares, we came to the comparatively gloomy streets of the

suburbs, a hundred times I thought we had lost the track. But always

in the pool of light cast by some friendly lamp, I would see the

quarry again speeding on before us.

At a lonely spot bordering the common the vehicle which contained

Zarmi stopped. I snatched up the speaking-tube.

"Drive on," I cried, "and pull up somewhere beyond! Not too far!"

The man obeyed, and presently I found myself standing in what was now

become a steady downpour, looking back at the headlights of the other

cab. I gave the driver his promised reward.

"Wait for ten minutes," I directed; "then if I have not returned, you

need wait no longer."

I strode along the muddy, unpaved path, to the spot where the cab, now

discharged, was being slowly backed away into the road. The figure of

Zarmi, unmistakable by reason of the lithe carriage, was crossing in

the direction of a path which seemingly led across the common. I

followed at a discreet distance. Realizing the tremendous potentialities

of this rencontre I seemed to rise to the occasion; my brain became

alert and clear; every faculty was at its brightest. And I felt

serenely confident of my ability to make the most of the situation.

Zarmi went on and on along the lonely path. Not another pedestrian was

in sight, and the rain walled in the pair of us. Where comfort-loving

humanity sought shelter from the inclement weather, we two moved out

there in the storm, linked by a common enmity.

I have said that my every faculty was keen, and have spoken of my

confidence in my own alertness. My condition, as a matter of fact,

must have been otherwise, and this belief in my powers merely

symptomatic of the fever which consumed me; for, as I was to learn,

I had failed to take the first elementary precaution necessary in

such case. I, who tracked another, had not counted upon being tracked

myself! ...

A bag or sack, reeking of some sickly perfume, was dropped silently,

accurately, over my head from behind; it was drawn closely about my

throat. One muffled shriek, strangely compound of fear and execration,

I uttered. I was stifling, choking ... I staggered--and fell....

CHAPTER XVII

I MEET DR. FU-MANCHU

My next impression was of a splitting headache, which, as memory

remounted its throne, brought up a train of recollections. I found

myself to be seated upon a heavy wooden bench set flat against a wall,

which was covered with a kind of straw matting. My hands were firmly

tied behind me. In the first agony of that reawakening I became aware

of two things.

I was in an operating-room, for the most conspicuous item of its

furniture was an operating-table! Shaded lamps were suspended above

it; and instruments, antiseptics, dressings, etc., were arranged upon

a glass-topped table beside it. Secondly, I had a companion.

Seated upon a similar bench on the other side of the room, was a

heavily built man, his dark hair splashed with gray, as were his

short, neatly trimmed beard and mustache. He, too, was pinioned; and

he stared across the table with a glare in which a sort of stupefied

wonderment predominated, but which was not free from terror.

It was Sir Baldwin Frazer!

"Sir Baldwin!" I muttered, moistening my parched lips with my tongue--

"Sir Baldwin!--how----"

"It is Dr. Petrie, is it not?" he said, his voice husky with emotion.

"Dr. Petrie!--my dear sir, in mercy tell me--what does this mean? I

have been kidnaped--drugged; made the victim of an inconceivable

outrage at the very door of my own house...."

I stood up unsteadily.

"Sir Baldwin," I interrupted, "you ask me what it means. It means that

we are in the hands of Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

Sir Baldwin stared at me wildly; his face was white and drawn with

anxiety.

"Dr. Fu-Manchu!" he said; "but my dear sir, this name conveys nothing

to me--nothing!" His manner momentarily was growing more distrait.

"Since my captivity began I have been given the use of a singular

suite of rooms in this place, and received, I must confess, every

possible attention. I have been waited upon by the she-devil who

lured me here, but not one word other than a species of coarse

badinage has she spoken to me. At times I have been tempted to

believe that the fate which frequently befalls the specialist had

befallen me? You understand?"

"I quite understand," I replied dully. "There have been times in the

past when I, too, have doubted my sanity in my dealings with the group

who now hold us in their power."

"But," reiterated the other, his voice rising higher and higher,

"what does it mean, my dear sir? It is incredible--fantastic! Even

now I find it difficult to disabuse my mind of that old, haunting

idea."

"Disabuse it at once, Sir Baldwin," I said bitterly. "The facts are

as you see them; the explanation, at any rate in your own case, is

quite beyond me. I was tracked ..."

"Hush! some one is coming!"

We both turned and stared at an opening before which hung a sort of

gaudily embroidered mat, as the sound of dragging footsteps,

accompanied by a heavy tapping, announced the approach of \_some one\_.

The mat was pulled aside by Zarmi. She turned her head, flashing

around the apartment a glance of her black eyes, then held the

drapery aside to admit the entrance of another....

Supporting himself by the aid of two heavy walking sticks and

painfully dragging his gaunt frame along, \_Dr. Fu-Manchu entered!\_

I think I have never experienced in my life a sensation identical to

that which now possessed me. Although Nayland Smith had declared that

Fu-Manchu was alive, yet I would have sworn upon oath before any

jury summonable that he was dead; for with my own eyes I had seen

the bullet enter his skull. Now, whilst I crouched against the

matting-covered wall, teeth tightly clenched and my very hair

quivering upon my scalp, he dragged himself laboriously across the

room, the sticks going \_tap--tap--tap\_ upon the floor, and the tall

body, enveloped in a yellow robe, bent grotesquely, gruesomely, with

every effort which he made. He wore a surgical bandage about his

skull and its presence seemed to accentuate the height of the great

domelike brow, to throw into more evil prominence the wonderful,

Satanic countenance of the man. His filmed eyes turning to right and

left, he dragged himself to a wooden chair that stood beside the

operating-table and sank down upon it, breathing sibilantly,

exhaustedly.

Zarmi dropped the curtain and stood before it. She had discarded the

dripping overall which she had been wearing when I had followed her

across the common, and now stood before me with her black, frizzy

hair unconfined and her beautiful, wicked face uplifted in a sort of

cynical triumph. The big gold rings in her ears glittered strangely

in the light of the electric lamps. She wore a garment which looked

like a silken shawl wrapped about her in a wildly picturesque

fashion, and, her hands upon her hips, leant back against the curtain

glancing defiantly from Sir Baldwin to myself.

Those moments of silence which followed the entrance of the Chinese

Doctor live in my memory and must live there for ever. Only the

labored breathing of Fu-Manchu disturbed the stillness of the place.

Not a sound penetrated to the room, no one uttered a word; then--

"Sir Baldwin Frazer." began Fu-Manchu in that indescribable voice,

alternating between the sibilant and the guttural, "you were promised

a certain fee for your services by my servant who summoned you. It

shall be paid and the gift of my personal gratitude be added to it."

He turned himself with difficulty to address Sir Baldwin; and it

became apparent to me that he was almost completely paralyzed down

one side of his body. Some little use he could make of his hand and

arm, for he still clutched the heavy carven stick, but the right side

of his face was completely immobile; and rarely had I seen anything

more ghastly than the effect produced upon that wonderful, Satanic

countenance. The mouth, from the center of the thin lips, opened only

to the left, as he spoke; in a word, seen in profile from where I sat,

or rather crouched, it was the face of a dead man.

Sir Baldwin Frazer uttered no word, but, crouching upon the bench

even as I crouched, stared--horror written upon every lineament--at

Dr. Fu-Manchu. The latter continued:--

"Your experience, Sir Baldwin, will enable you readily to diagnose my

symptoms. Owing to the passage of a bullet along a portion of the

third left frontal into the postero-parietal convolution--upon which,

from its lodgment in the skull, it continues to press--hemiplegia of

the right side has supervened. Aphasia is present also...."

The effort of speech was ghastly. Beads of perspiration dewed

Fu-Manchu's brow, and I marveled at the iron will of the man, whereby

alone he forced his half-numbed brain to perform its function. He

seemed to select his words elaborately and by this monstrous effort

of will to compel his partially paralyzed tongue to utter them. Some

of the syllables were slurred; but nevertheless distinguishable. It

was a demonstration of sheer \_Force\_ unlike any I had witnessed, and

it impressed me unforgettably.

"The removal of this injurious particle," he continued, "would be an

operation which I myself could undertake to perform successfully upon

another. It is a matter of some delicacy as you, Sir Baldwin, and"--

slowly, horribly, turning the half-dead and half-living head towards

me--"you, Dr. Petrie, will appreciate. In the event of clumsy surgery,

death may supervene; failing this, permanent hemiplegia--or"--the

film lifted from the green eyes, and for a moment they flickered with

transient horror--"idiocy! Any one of three of my pupils whom I might

name could perform this operation with ease, but their services are

not available. Only one English surgeon occurred to me in this

connection, and you, Sir Baldwin"--again he slowly turned his head--

"were he. Dr. Petrie will act as anaesthetist, and, your duties

completed, you shall return to your home richer by the amount

stipulated. I have suitably prepared myself for the operation, and I

can assure you of the soundness of my heart. I may advise you, Dr.

Petrie"--again turning to me--"that my constitution is inured to the

use of opium. You will make due allowance for this. Mr. Li-King-Su,

a graduate of Canton, will act as dresser."

He turned laboriously to Zarmi. She clapped her hands and held the

curtain aside. A perfectly immobile Chinaman, whose age I was unable

to guess, and who wore a white overall, entered, bowed composedly to

Frazer and myself and began in a matter-of-fact way to prepare the

dressings.

CHAPTER XVIII

QUEEN OF HEARTS

"Sir Baldwin Frazer," said Fu-Manchu, interrupting a wild outburst

from the former, "your refusal is dictated by insufficient knowledge

of your surroundings. You find yourself in a place strange to you, a

place to which no clue can lead your friends; in the absolute power

of a man--myself--who knows no law other than his own and that of

those associated with him. Virtually, Sir Baldwin, you stand in

China; and in China we know how to \_exact\_ obedience. You will not

refuse, for Dr. Petrie will tell you something of my \_wire-jackets\_

and my \_files\_...."

I saw Sir Baldwin Frazer blanch. He could not know what I knew of the

significance of those words--"my wire-jackets, my files"--but perhaps

something of my own horror communicated itself to him.

"You will not \_refuse\_" continued Fu-Manchu softly; "my only fear for

you is that the operation my prove unsuccessful! In that event not

even my own great clemency could save you, for by virtue of your

failure I should be powerless to intervene." He paused for some

moments, staring directly at the surgeon. "There are those within

sound of my voice," he added sibilantly, "who would flay you alive in

the lamentable event of your failure, who would cast your flayed

body"--he paused, waving one quivering fist above his head, "to the

rats--to the rats!"

Sir Baldwin's forehead was bathed in perspiration now. It was an

incredible and a gruesome situation, a nightmare become reality. But,

whatever my own case, I could see that Sir Baldwin Frazer was

convinced, I could see that his consent would no longer be withheld.

"You, my dear friend," said Fu-Manchu, turning to me and resuming his

studied and painful composure of manner, "will also consent...."

Within my heart of hearts I could not doubt him; I knew that my

courage was not of a quality high enough to sustain the frightful

ordeals summoned up before my imagination by those words--"my files,

my wire-jackets!"

"In the event, however, of any little obstinancy," he added,

"another will plead with you."

A chill like that of death descended upon me--as, for the second

time, Zarmi clapped her hands, pulled the curtain aside ... and

Kâramaneh was thrust into the room!

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

There comes a blank in my recollections. Long after Kâramaneh had

been plucked out again by the two muscular brown hands which clutched

her shoulders from the darkness beyond the doorway, I seemed to see

her standing there, in her close-fitting traveling dress. Her hair

was unbound, disheveled, her lovely face pale to the lips--and her

eyes, her glorious, terror-bright eyes, looked fully into mine....

Not a word did she utter, and I was stricken dumb as one who has

plucked the Flower of Silence. Only those wondrous eyes seemed to

look into my soul, searing, consuming me.

Fu-Manchu had been speaking for some time ere my brain began again

to record his words.

"----and this magnanimity," came dully to my ears, "extends to you,

Dr. Petrie, because of my esteem. I have little cause to love

Kâramaneh"--his voice quivered furiously--"but she can yet be of

use to me, and I would not harm a hair of her beautiful head--except

in the event of your obstinacy. Shall we then determine your

immediate future upon the turn of a card, as the gamester within me,

within every one of my race, suggests?

"Yes, yes!" came hoarsely.

I fought mentally to restore myself to a full knowledge of what was

happening, and I realized that the last words had come from the lips

of Sir Baldwin Frazer.

"Dr. Petrie," Frazer said, still in the same hoarse and unnatural

voice, "what else can we do? At least take the chance of recovering

your freedom, for how otherwise can you hope to serve--your friend...."

"God knows!" I said dully; "do as you wish"--and cared not to what I

had agreed.

Plunging his hand beneath his white overall, the Chinaman who had been

referred to as Li-King-Su calmly produced a pack of cards,

unemotionally shuffled them and extended the pack to me.

I shook my head grimly, for my hands were tied. Picking up a lancet

from the table, the Chinaman cut the cords which bound me, and again

extended the pack. I took a card and laid it on my knee without even

glancing at it. Fu-Manchu, with his left hand, in turn selected a

card, looked at it and then turned its face towards me.

"It would seem, Dr. Petrie," he said calmly, "that you are fated to

remain here as my guest. You will have the felicity of residing

beneath the same roof with Kâramaneh."

The card was the Knave of Diamonds.

Conscious of a sudden excitement, I snatched up the card from my

knee. It was the Queen of Hearts! For a moment I tasted exultation,

then I tossed it upon the floor. I was not fool enough to suppose

that the Chinese Doctor would pay his debt of honor and release me.

"Your star above mine," said Fu-Manchu, his calm unruffled. "I place

myself in your hands, Sir Baldwin."

Assisted by his unemotional compatriot, Fu-Manchu discarded the

yellow robe, revealing himself in a white singlet in all his gaunt

ugliness, and extended his frame upon the operating-table.

Li-King-Su ignited the large lamp over the head of the table, and

from his case took out a trephine.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"Other points for your guidance from my own considerable store of

experience"--Fu-Manchu was speaking--"are written out clearly in the

notebook which lies upon the table...."

His voice, now, was toneless, emotionless, as though his part in the

critical operation about to be performed were that of a spectator. No

trace of nervousness, of fear, could I discern; his pulse was

practically normal.

How I shuddered as I touched his yellow skin! how my very soul rose

up in revolt! ...

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"There is the bullet!--quick! ... Steady, Petrie!"

Sir Baldwin Frazer, keen, cool, deft, was metamorphosed, was the

enthusiastic, brilliant surgeon whom I knew and revered, and another

than the nerveless captive who, but a few minutes ago, had stared,

panic-stricken, at Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Although I had met him once or twice professionally, I had never

hitherto seen him operate; and his method was little short of

miraculous. It was stimulating, inspiring. With unerring touch he

whittled madness, death, from the very throne of reason, of life.

Now was the crucial moment of his task ... and, with its coming, every

light in the room suddenly failed--went out!

"My God!" whispered Frazer, in the darkness, "quick! quick! lights!

a match!--a candle!--something, anything!"

There came a faint click, and a beam of white light was directed,

steadily, upon the patient's skull. Li-King-Su--unmoved--held an

electric torch in his hand!

Frazer and I set to work, in a fierce battle to fend off Death, who

already outstretched his pinions over the insensible man--to fend off

Death from the arch-murderer, the enemy of the white races, who lay

there at our mercy! ...

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"It seems you want a pick-me-up!" said Zarmi. Sir Baldwin Frazer

collapsed into the cane arm-chair. Only a matting curtain separated us

from the room wherein he had successfully performed perhaps the most

wonderful operation of his career.

"I could not have lasted out another thirty seconds, Petrie!" he

whispered. "The events which led up to it had exhausted my nerves and

I had no reserve to call upon. If that last ..."

He broke off, the sentence uncompleted, and eagerly seized the tumbler

containing brandy and soda, which the beautiful, wicked-eyed Eurasian

passed to him. She turned, and prepared a drink for me, with the

insolent \_insouciance\_ which had never deserted her.

I emptied the tumbler at a draught.

Even as I set the glass down I realized, too late, that it was the

first drink I had ever permitted to pass my lips within an abode of

Dr. Fu-Manchu....

I started to my feet.

"Frazer!" I muttered--"we've been drugged! we ..."

"You sit down," came Zarmi's husky voice, and I felt her hands upon

my breast, pushing me back into my seat. "You very tired ... you go

to sleep...."

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"Petrie! Dr. Petrie!"

The words broke in through the curtain of unconsciousness. I strove

to arouse myself. I felt cold and wet. I opened my eyes--and the world

seemed to be swimming dizzily about me. Then a hand grasped my arm,

roughly.

"Brace up! Brace up, Petrie--and thank God you are alive! ..."

I was sitting beside Sir Baldwin Frazer on a wooden bench, under a

leafless tree, from the ghostly limbs whereof rain trickled down upon

me! In the gray light, which, I thought, must be the light of dawn,

I discerned other trees about us and an open expanse, tree-dotted,

stretching into the misty grayness.

"Where are we?" I muttered--"where ..."

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," replied my bedraggled companion, "and

I don't think I am, for I attended a consultation in this neighborhood

less than a week ago, we somewhere on the west side of Wandsworth

Common!"

He ceased speaking; then uttered a suppressed cry. There came a

jangling of coins, and dimly I saw him to be staring at a canvas bag

of money which he held.

"Merciful heavens!" he said, "am I mad--or did I \_really\_ perform that

operation? And can this be my fee? ..."

I laughed loudly, wildly, plunging my wet, cold hands into the pockets

of my rain-soaked overcoat. In one of them, my fingers came in contact

with a piece of cardboard. It had an unfamiliar feel, and I pulled it

out, peering at it in the dim light.

"Well, I'm damned!" muttered Frazer--"then I'm not mad, after all!"

It was the Queen of Hearts!

CHAPTER XIX

"ZAGAZIG"

Fully two weeks elapsed ere Nayland Smith's arduous labors at last met

with a slight reward. For a moment, the curtain of mystery surrounding

the Si-Fan was lifted, and we had a glimpse of that organization's

elaborate mechanism. I cannot better commence my relation of the

episodes associated with the Zagazig's cryptogram than from the moment

when I found myself bending over a prostrate form extended upon the

table in the Inspector's room at the River Police Depôt. It was that

of a man who looked like a Lascar, who wore an ill-fitting slop-shop

suit of blue, soaked and stained and clinging hideously to his body.

His dank black hair was streaked upon his low brow; and his face,

although it was notable for a sort of evil leer, had assumed in death

another and more dreadful expression.

Asphyxiation had accounted for his end beyond doubt, but there were

marks about his throat of clutching fingers, his tongue protruded,

and the look in the dead eyes was appalling.

"He was amongst the piles upholding the old wharf at the back of the

Joy-Shop?" said Smith tersely, turning to the police officer in charge.

"Exactly" was the reply. "The in-coming tide had jammed him right up

under a cross-beam."

"What time was that?'

"Well, at high tide last night. Hewson, returning with the ten o'clock

boat, noticed the moonlight glittering upon the knife."

The knife to which the Inspector referred possessed a long curved

blade of a kind with which I had become terribly familiar in the past.

The dead man still clutched the hilt of the weapon in his right hand,

and it now lay with the blade resting crosswise upon his breast. I

stared in a fascinated way at this mysterious and tragic flotsam of

old Thames.

Glancing up, I found Nayland Smith's gray eyes watching me.

"You see the mark, Petrie?" he snapped.

I nodded. The dead man upon the table was a Burmese dacoit!

"What do you make of it?" I said slowly.

"At the moment," replied Smith, "I scarcely know what to make of it.

You are agreed with the divisional surgeon that the man--unquestionably

a dacoit--died, not from drowning, but from strangulation. From

evidence we have heard, it would appear that the encounter which

resulted in the body being hurled in the river, actually took place

upon the wharf-end beneath which he was found. And we know that a place

formerly used by the Si-Fan group--in other words, by Dr. Fu-Manchu--

adjoins the wharf. I am tempted to believe that this"--he nodded

towards the ghastly and sinister object upon the table--"was a servant

of the Chinese Doctor. In other words, we see before us one whom

Fu-Manchu has rebuked for some shortcoming."

I shuddered coldly. Familiar as I should have been with the methods of

the dread Chinaman, with his callous disregard of human suffering, of

human life, of human law, I could not reconcile my ideas--the ideas

of a modern, ordinary middle-class practitioner--with these Far Eastern

devilries which were taking place in London.

Even now I sometimes found myself doubting the reality of the whole

thing; found myself reviewing the history of the Eastern doctor and

of the horrible group of murderers surrounding him, with an incredulity

almost unbelievable in one who had been actually in contact not only

with the servants of the Chinaman, but with the sinister Fu-Manchu

himself. Then, to restore me to grips with reality, would come the

thought of Kâramaneh, of the beautiful girl whose love had brought

me seemingly endless sorrow and whose love for me had brought her once

again into the power of that mysterious, implacable being.

This thought was enough. With its coming, fantasy vanished; and I knew

that the dead dacoit, his great curved knife yet clutched in his hand,

the Yellow menace hanging over London, over England, over the

civilized world, the absence, the heart-breaking absence, of

Kâramaneh--all were real, all were true, all were part of my life.

Nayland Smith was standing staring vaguely before him and tugging at

the lobe of his left ear.

"Come along!" he snapped suddenly. "We have no more to learn here:

the clue to the mystery must be sought elsewhere."

There was that in his manner whereby I knew that his thoughts were far

away, as we filed out from the River Police Depôt to the cab which

awaited us. Pulling from his overcoat pocket a copy of a daily paper--

"Have you seen this, Weymouth?" he demanded.

With a long, nervous index finger he indicated a paragraph on the front

page which appeared under the heading of "Personal." Weymouth bent

frowningly over the paper, holding it close to his eyes, for this was

a gloomy morning and the light in the cab was poor.

"Such things don't enter into my sphere, Mr. Smith," he replied, "but

no doubt the proper department at the Yard have seen it."

"I \_know\_ they have seen it!" snapped Smith; "but they have also been

unable to read it!"

Weymouth looked up in surprise.

"Indeed," he said. "You are interested in this, then?"

"Very! Have you any suggestion to offer respecting it?"

Moving from my seat I, also, bent over the paper and read, in growing

astonishment, the following:--

ZAGAZIG-Z,-a-g-a;-z:-\_I\_-g,a,-a,ag-\_a\_,z;-

I;-g:z-a-g-A-z;i-:g;-Z,,-a;-gg-\_-z-i;-

G;-z-,a-g-:a-Z\_\_I\_;-g:-z-a-g;-a-:Z-,i-g:

z,a-g,-a:z,i-g.

"This is utterly incomprehensible! It can be nothing but some foolish

practical joke! It consists merely of the word 'Zagazig' repeated six

or seven times--which can have no possible significance!"

"Can't it!" snapped Smith.

"Well," I said, "what has Zagazig to do with Fu-Manchu, or to do with

us?"

"Zagazig, my dear Petrie, is a very unsavory Arab town in Lower Egypt,

as you know!"

He returned the paper to the pocket of his over-coat, and, noting my

bewildered glance, burst into one of his sudden laughs.

"You think I am talking nonsense," he said; "but, as a matter of fact,

that message in the paper has been puzzling me since it appeared--

yesterday morning--and at last I think I see the light."

He pulled out his pipe and began rapidly to load it.

"I have been growing careless of late, Petrie," he continued; and no

hint of merriment remained in his voice. His gaunt face was drawn

grimly, and his eyes glittered like steel. "In future I must avoid

going out alone at night as much as possible."

Inspector Weymouth was staring at Smith in a puzzled way; and certainly

I was every whit as mystified as he.

"I am disposed to believe," said my friend, in his rapid, incisive way,

"that the dacoit met his end at the hands of a tall man, possibly dark

and almost certainly clean-shaven. If this missing personage wears, on

chilly nights, a long tweed traveling coat and affects soft gray hats

of the Stetson pattern, I shall not be surprised."

Weymouth stared at me in frank bewilderment.

"By the way, Inspector," added Smith, a sudden gleam of inspiration

entering his keen eyes--"did I not see that the s.s.\_Andaman\_ arrived

recently?"

"The Oriental Navigation Company's boat?" inquired Weymouth in a

hopeless tone. "Yes. She docked yesterday evening."

"If Jack Forsyth is still chief officer, I shall look him up,"

declared Smith. "You recall his brother, Petrie?"

"Naturally; since he was done to death in my presence," I replied;

for the words awoke memories of one of Dr. Fu-Manchu's most ghastly

crimes, always associated in my mind with the cry of a night-hawk.

"The divine afflatus should never be neglected," announced Nayland

Smith didactically, "wild though its promptings may seem."

CHAPTER XX

THE NOTE ON THE DOOR

I saw little of Nayland Smith for the remainder of that day.

Presumably he was following those "promptings" to which he had

referred, though I was unable to conjecture whither they were leading

him. Then, towards dusk he arrived in a perfect whirl, figuratively

sweeping me off my feet.

"Get your coat on, Petrie!" he cried; "you forget that we have a most

urgent appointment!"

Beyond doubt I had forgotten that we had any appointment whatever that

evening, and some surprise must have shown upon my face, for--

"Really you are becoming very forgetful!" my friend continued. "You

know we can no longer trust the 'phone. I have to leave certain

instructions for Weymouth at the rendezvous!"

There was a hidden significance in his manner, and, my memory harking

back to an adventure which we had shared in the past, I suddenly

glimpsed the depths of my own stupidity.

He suspected the presence of an eavesdropper! Yes! incredible though

it might appear, we were spied upon in the New Louvre; agents of the

Si-Fan, of Dr. Fu-Manchu, were actually within the walls of the great

hotel!

We hurried out into the corridor, and descended by the lift to the

lobby. M. Samarkan, long famous as \_mâitre d'hôtel\_ of one of Cairo's

fashionable \_khans\_, and now principal of the New Louvre, greeted us

with true Greek courtesy. He trusted that we should be present at

some charitable function or other to be held at the hotel on the

following evening.

"If possible, M. Samarkan--if possible," said Smith. "We have many

demands upon our time." Then, abruptly, to me: "Come, Petrie, we will

walk as far as Charing Cross and take a cab from the rank there."

"The hall-porter can call you a cab," said M. Samarkan, solicitous for

the comfort of his guests.

"Thanks," snapped Smith; "we prefer to walk a little way."

Passing along the Strand, he took my arm, and speaking close to my ear--

"That place is alive with spies, Petrie," he said; "or if there are

only a few of them they are remarkably efficient!"

Not another word could I get from him, although I was eager enough to

talk; since one dearer to me than all else in the world was in the

hands of the damnable organization we knew as the Si-Fan; until,

arrived at Charing Cross, he walked out to the cab rank, and--

"Jump in!" he snapped.

He opened the door of the first cab on the rank.

"Drive to J---- Street, Kennington," he directed the man.

In something of a mental stupor I entered and found myself seated

beside Smith. The cab made off towards Trafalgar Square, then swung

around into Whitehall.

"Look behind!" cried Smith, intense excitement expressed in his voice--

"look behind!"

I turned and peered through the little square window.

The cab which had stood second upon the rank was closely following us!

"We are tracked!" snapped my companion. "If further evidence were

necessary of the fact that our every movement is watched, here it is!"

I turned to him, momentarily at a loss for words; then--

"Was this the object of our journey?" I said. "Your reference to a

'rendezvous' was presumably addressed to a hypothetical spy?

"Partly," he replied. "I have a plan, as you will see in a moment."

I looked again from the window in the rear of the cab. We were now

passing between the House of Lords and the back of Westminster Abbey ...

and fifty yards behind us the pursuing cab was crossing from

Whitehall! A great excitement grew up within me, and a great curiosity

respecting the identity of our pursuer.

"What is the place for which we are bound, Smith?" I said rapidly.

"It is a house which I chanced to notice a few days ago, and I marked

it as useful for such a purpose as our present one. You will see what

I mean when we arrive."

On we went, following the course of the river, then turned over

Vauxhall Bridge and on down Vauxhall Bridge Road into a very dreary

neighborhood where gasometers formed the notable feature of the

landscape.

"That's the Oval just beyond," said Smith suddenly, "and--here we are."

In a narrow \_cul de sac\_ which apparently communicated with the

boundary of the famous cricket ground, the cabman pulled up. Smith

jumped out and paid the fare.

"Pull back to that court with the iron posts," he directed the man,

"and wait there for me." Then: "Come on, Petrie!" he snapped.

Side by side we entered the wooden gate of a small detached house, or

more properly cottage, and passed up the tiled path towards a sort of

side entrance which apparently gave access to the tiny garden. At this

moment I became aware of two things; the first, that the house was an

empty one, and the second, that some one--some one who had quitted the

second cab (which I had heard pull up at no great distance behind us)

was approaching stealthily along the dark and uninviting street,

walking upon the opposite pavement and taking advantage of the shadow

of a high wooden fence which skirted it for some distance.

Smith pushed the gate open, and I found myself in a narrow passageway

in almost complete darkness. But my friend walked confidently forward,

turned the angle of the building and entered the miniature wilderness

which once had been a garden.

"In here, Petrie!" he whispered.

He seized me by the arm, pushed open a door and thrust me forward down

two stone steps into absolute darkness.

"Walk straight ahead!" he directed, still in the same intense whisper,

"and you will find a locked door having a broken panel. Watch through

the opening for any one who may enter the room beyond, but see that

your presence is not detected. Whatever I say or do, don't stir until

I actually rejoin you."

He stepped back across the floor and was gone. One glimpse I had of

him, silhouetted against the faint light of the open door, then the

door was gently closed, and I was left alone in the empty house.

Smith's methods frequently surprised me, but always in the past I had

found that they were dictated by sound reasons. I had no doubt that an

emergency unknown to me dictated his present course, but it was with

my mind in a wildly confused condition, that I groped for and found

the door with the broken panel and that I stood there in the complete

darkness of the deserted house listening.

I can well appreciate how the blind develop an unusually keen sense of

hearing; for there, in the blackness, which (at first) was entirely

unrelieved by any speck of light, I became aware of the fact, by dint

of tense listening, that Smith was retiring by means of some gateway

at the upper end of the little garden, and I became aware of the fact

that a lane or court, with which this gateway communicated, gave

access to the main road.

Faintly, I heard our discharged cab backing out from the \_cul de sac\_;

then, from some nearer place, came Smith's voice speaking loudly.

"Come along, Petrie!" he cried; "there is no occasion for us to wait.

Weymouth will see the note pinned on the door."

I started--and was about to stumble back across the room, when, as my

mind began to work more clearly, I realized that the words had been

spoken as a ruse--a favorite device of Nayland Smith's.

Rigidly I stood there, and continued to listen.

"All right, cabman!" came more distantly now; "back to the New Louvre--

jump in, Petrie!"

The cab went rattling away ... as a faint light became perceptible in

the room beyond the broken panel.

Hitherto I had been able to detect the presence of this panel only by

my sense of touch and by means of a faint draught which blew through

it; now it suddenly became clearly perceptible. I found myself looking

into what was evidently the principal room of the house--a dreary

apartment with tatters of paper hanging from the walls and litter of

all sorts lying about upon the floor and in the rusty fireplace.

Some one had partly raised the front window and opened the shutters.

A patch of moonlight shone down upon the floor immediately below my

hiding-place and furthermore enabled me vaguely to discern the disorder

of the room.

A bulky figure showed silhouetted against the dirty panes. It was that

of a man who, leaning upon the window sill, was peering intently in.

Silently he had approached, and silently had raised the sash and

opened the shutters.

For thirty seconds or more he stood so, moving his head from right to

left ... and I watched him through the broken panel, almost holding my

breath with suspense. Then, fully raising the window, the man stepped

into the room, and, first reclosing the shutters, suddenly flashed the

light of an electric lamp all about the place. I was enabled to

discern him more clearly, this mysterious spy who had tracked us from

the moment that we had left the hotel.

He was a man of portly build wearing a heavy fur-lined overcoat and

having a soft felt hat, the brim turned down so as to shade the upper

part of his face. Moreover, he wore his fur collar turned up, which

served further to disguise him, since it concealed the greater part

of his chin. But the eyes which now were searching every corner of

the room, the alert, dark eyes, were strangely familiar. The black

mustache, the clear-cut, aquiline nose, confirmed the impression.

Our follower was M. Samarkan, manager of the New Louvre.

I suppressed a gasp of astonishment. Small wonder that our plans had

leaked out. This was a momentous discovery indeed.

And as I watched the portly Greek who was not only one of the most

celebrated \_mâitres d'hôtel\_ in Europe, but also a creature of Dr.

Fu-Manchu, he cast the light of his electric lamp upon a note attached

by means of a drawing-pin to the inside of the room door. I

immediately divined that my friend must have pinned the note in its

place earlier in the day; even at that distance I recognized Smith's

neat, illegible writing.

Samarkan quickly scanned the message scribbled upon the white page;

then, exhibiting an agility uncommon in a man of his bulk, he threw

open the shutters again, having first replaced his lamp in his pocket,

climbed out into the little front garden, reclosed the window, and

disappeared!

A moment I stood, lost to my surroundings, plunged in a sea of

wonderment concerning the damnable organization which, its tentacles

extending I knew not whither, since new and unexpected limbs were ever

coming to light, sought no less a goal than Yellow dominion of the

world! I reflected how one man--Nayland Smith--alone stood between

this powerful group and the realization of their project ... when I

was aroused by a hand grasping my arm in the darkness!

I uttered a short cry, of which I was instantly ashamed, for Nayland

Smith's voice came:--

"I startled you, eh, Petrie?"

"Smith," I said, "how long have you been standing there?"

"I only returned in time to see our Fenimore Cooper friend retreating

through the window," he replied; "but no doubt you had a good look at

him?"

"I had!" I answered eagerly. "It was Samarkan!"

"I thought so! I have suspected as much for a long time."

"Was this the object of our visit here?"

"It was one of the objects," admitted Nayland Smith evasively.

From some place not far distant came the sound of a restarted engine.

"The other," he added, "was this: to enable M. Samarkan to read the

note which I had pinned upon the door!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE SECOND MESSAGE

"Here you are, Petrie," said Nayland Smith--and he tossed across the

table the folded copy of a morning paper. "This may assist you in your

study of the first Zagazig message."

I set down my cup and turned my attention to the "Personal" column on

the front page of the journal. A paragraph appeared therein conceived

as follows:--

ZAGAZIG-\_Z\_-a-g-\_a\_;-z:-I:-\_g\_;z-a,g;-

A-,\_z\_;\_i\_:\_G\_,-z:\_a\_;\_g\_-A,z-\_i\_;-gz

\_A\_;\_g\_aZ-\_i\_;\_g\_-:a z i g

I stared across at my friend in extreme bewilderment.

"But, Smith!" I cried, "these messages are utterly meaningless!"

"Not at all," he rapped back. "Scotland Yard thought they were

meaningless at first, and I must admit that they suggested nothing to

me for a long time; but the dead dacoit was the clue to the first,

Petrie, and the note pinned upon the door of the house near the Oval

is the clue to the second."

Stupidly I continued to stare at him until he broke into a grim smile.

"Surely you understand?" he said. "You remember where the dead Burman

was found?"

"Perfectly."

"You know the street along which, ordinarily, one would approach the

wharf?"

"Three Colt Street?"

"Three Colt Street, exactly. Well, on the night that the Burman met

his end I had an appointment in Three Colt Street with Weymouth. The

appointment was made by 'phone, from the New Louvre! My cab broke down

and I never arrived. I discovered later that Weymouth had received a

telegram purporting to come from me, putting off the engagement."

"I am aware of all this!"

Nayland Smith burst into a loud laugh.

"But \_still\_ you are fogged!" he cried. "Then I'm hanged if I'll pilot

you any farther! You have all the facts before you. There lies the

first Zagazig message; here is the second; and you know the context of

the note pinned upon the door? It read, if you remember, 'Remove

patrol from Joy-Shop neighborhood. Have a theory. Wish to visit place

alone on Monday night after one o'clock.'"

"Smith," I said dully, "I have a heavy stake upon this murderous game."

His manner changed instantly; the tanned face grew grim and hard, but

the steely eyes softened strangely. He bent over me, clapping his hands

upon my shoulders.

"I know it, old man," he replied; "and because it may serve to keep

your mind busy during hours when otherwise it would be engaged with

profitless sorrows, I invite you to puzzle out this business for

yourself. You have nothing else to do until late to-night, and you can

work undisturbed, here, at any rate!"

His words referred to the fact that, without surrendering our suite at

the New Louvre Hotel, we had gone upon a visit, of indefinite duration,

to a mythical friend; and now were quartered in furnished chambers

adjoining Fleet Street.

We had remained at the New Louvre long enough to secure confirmation

of our belief that a creature of Fu-Manchu spied upon us there; and

now we only awaited the termination of the night's affair to take

such steps as Smith might consider politic in regard to the sardonic

Greek who presided over London's newest and most palatial hotel.

Smith setting out for New Scotland Yard in order to make certain final

arrangements in connection with the business of the night, I began

closely to study the mysterious Zagazig messages, determined not to be

beaten, and remembering the words of Edgar Allan Poe--the strange

genius to whom we are indebted for the first workable system of

deciphering cryptograms: "It may well be doubted whether human

ingenuity can construct an enigma of the kind which human ingenuity

may not, by proper application, resolve."

The first conclusion to which I was borne was this: that the letters

comprising the word "Zagazig" were designed merely to confuse the

reader, and might be neglected; since, occurring as they did in regular

sequence, they could possess no significance. I became quite excited

upon making the discovery that the \_punctuation marks\_ varied in

almost every case!

I immediately assumed that these constituted the cipher; and, seeking

for my key-letter, \_e\_ (that which most frequently occurs in the

English language), I found the sign of a full-stop to appear more

frequently than any other in the first message, namely ten times,

although it only occurred thrice in the second. Nevertheless, I was

hopeful ... until I discovered that in two cases it appeared three

times \_in succession!\_

There is no word in English, nor, so far as I am aware, in any language,

where this occurs, either in regard to \_e\_ or any other letter!

That unfortunate discovery seemed so wholly to destroy the very theory

upon which I relied, that I almost abandoned my investigation there

and then. Indeed, I doubt if I ever should have proceeded were it not

that by a piece of pure guesswork I blundered on to a clue.

I observed that certain letters, at irregularly occurring intervals,

were set in capital, and I divided up the message into corresponding

sections, in the hope that th capitals might indicate the

commencements of words. This accomplished, I set out upon a series

of guesses, basing these upon Smith's assurance that the death of the

dacoit afforded a clue to the first message and the note which he

(Smith) had pinned upon the door a clue to the second.

Such being my system--if I can honor my random attempts with the

title--I take little credit to myself for the fortunate result. In

short, I determined (although \_e\_ twice occurred where \_r\_ should have

been!) that the first message from the thirteenth letter, onwards to

the twenty-seventh (\_id est:\_ \_I;\_g:-zagAz;i-;\_g\_;\_-Z\_,-a;-\_g\_azi;-)

read:--

\_"Three Colt Street."\_

Endeavoring, now, to eliminate the \_e\_ where \_r\_ should appear, I made

another discovery. The presence of a letter in \_italics\_ altered the

value of the sign which followed it!

From that point onward the task became child's-play, and I should

merely render this account tedious if I entered into further details.

Both messages commenced with the name "Smith" as I early perceived,

and half an hour of close study gave me the complete sentences, thus:--

1. \_Smith passing Three Colt Street twelve-thirty Wednesday.\_

2. \_Smith going Joy-Shop after one Monday.\_

The word "Zagazig" was completed, always, and did not necessarily

terminate with the last letter occurring in the cryptographic message.

A subsequent inspection of this curious code has enabled Nayland

Smith, by a process of simple deduction, to compile the entire alphabet

employed by Dr. Fu-Manchu's agent, Samarkan, in communicating with his

awful superior. With a little patience, any one of my readers my achieve

the same result (and I should be pleased to hear from those who succeed!).

This, then was the outcome of my labors; and although it enlightened me

to some extent, I realized that I still had much to learn.

The dacoit, apparently, had met his death at the very hour when Nayland

Smith should have been passing along Three Colt Street--a thoroughfare

with an unsavory reputation. Who had killed him?

To-night, Samarkan advised the Chinese doctor, Smith would again be in

the same dangerous neighborhood. A strange thrill of excitement swept

through me. I glanced at my watch. Yes! It was time for me to repair,

secretly, to my post. For I, too, had business on the borders of

Chinatown to-night.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECRET OF THE WHARF

I sat in the evil-smelling little room with its low, blackened ceiling,

and strove to avoid making the slightest noise; but the crazy boards

creaked beneath me with every movement. The moon hung low in an almost

cloudless sky; for, following the spell of damp and foggy weather, a

fall in temperature had taken place, and there was a frosty snap in

the air to-night.

Through the open window the moonlight poured in and spilled its pure

luminance upon the filthy floor; but I kept religiously within the

shadows, so posted, however, that I could command an uninterrupted

view of the street from the point where it crossed the creek to that

where it terminated at the gates of the deserted wharf.

Above and below me the crazy building formerly known as the Joy-Shop

and once the nightly resort of the Asiatic riff-raff from the docks--

was silent, save for the squealing and scuffling of the rats. The

melancholy lapping of the water frequently reached my ears, and a more

or less continuous din from the wharves and workshops upon the further

bank of the Thames; but in the narrow, dingy streets immediately

surrounding the house, quietude reigned and no solitary footstep

disturbed it.

Once, looking down in the direction of the bridge, I gave a great

start, for a black patch of shadow moved swiftly across the path and

merged into the other shadows bordering a high wall. My heart leapt

momentarily, then, in another instant, the explanation of the mystery

became apparent--in the presence of a gaunt and prowling cat. Bestowing

a suspicious glance upward in my direction, the animal slunk away toward

the path bordering the cutting.

By a devious route amid ghostly gasometers I had crept to my post in

the early dusk, before the moon was risen, and already I was heartily

weary of my passive part in the affair of the night. I had never before

appreciated the multitudinous sounds, all of them weird and many of

them horrible, which are within the compass of those great black rats

who find their way to England with cargoes from Russia and elsewhere.

From the rafters above my head, from the wall recesses about me, from

the floor beneath my feet, proceeded a continuous and nerve-shattering

concert, an unholy symphony which seemingly accompanied the eternal

dance of the rats.

Sometimes a faint splash from below would tell of one of the revelers

taking the water, but save for the more distant throbbing of riverside

industry, and rarer note of shipping, the mad discords of this rat

saturnalia alone claimed the ear.

The hour was nigh now, when matters should begin to develop. I

followed the chimes from the clock of some church nearby--I have never

learnt its name; and was conscious of a thrill of excitement when

they warned me that the hour was actually arrived....

A strange figure appeared noiselessly, from I knew not where, and

stood fully within view upon the bridge crossing the cutting, peering

to right and left, in an attitude of listening. It was the figure of

a bedraggled old woman, gray-haired, and carrying a large bundle tied

up in what appeared to be a red shawl. Of her face I could see little,

since it was shaded by the brim of her black bonnet, but she rested

her bundle upon the low wall of the bridge, and to my intense

surprise, sat down upon it!

She evidently intended to remain there.

I drew back further into the darkness; for the presence of this

singular old woman at such a place, and at that hour, could not well

be accidental. I was convinced that the first actor in the drama had

already taken the stage. Whether I was mistaken or not must shortly

appear.

Crisp footsteps sounded upon the roadway; distantly, and from my

left. Nearer they approached and nearer. I saw the old woman, in the

shadow of the wall, glance once rapidly in the direction of the

approaching pedestrian. For some occult reason, the chorus of the

rats was stilled. Only that firm and regular tread broke the intimate

silence of the dreary spot.

Now the pedestrian came within my range of sight. It was Nayland Smith!

He wore a long tweed overcoat with which I was familiar, and a soft

felt hat, the brim pulled down all around in a fashion characteristic

of him, and probably acquired during the years spent beneath the

merciless sun of Burma. He carried a heavy walking-cane which I knew

to be a formidable weapon that he could wield to good effect. But,

despite the stillness about me, a stillness which had reigned

uninterruptedly (save for the \_danse macabre\_ of the rats) since the

coming of dusk, some voice within, ignoring these physical evidences

of solitude, spoke urgently of lurking assassins; of murderous

Easterns armed with those curved knives which sometimes flashed

before my eyes in dreams; of a deathly menace which hid in the

shadows about me, in the many shadows cloaking the holes and corners

of the ramshackle building, draping arches, crannies and portals to

which the moonlight could not penetrate.

He was abreast of the Joy-Shop now, and in sight of the ominous old

witch huddled upon the bridge. He pulled up suddenly and stood

looking at her. Coincident with his doing so, she began to moan and

sway her body to right and left as if in pain; then--

"Kind gentleman," she whined in a sing-song voice, "thank God you came

this way to help a poor old woman."

"What is the matter?" said Smith tersely, approaching her.

I clenched my fists. I could have cried out; I was indeed hard put to

it to refrain from crying out--from warning him. But his injunctions

had been explicit, and I restrained myself by a great effort,

preserving silence and crouching there at the window, but with every

muscle tensed and a desire for action strong upon me.

"I tripped up on a rough stone, sir," whined the old creature, "and

here I've been sitting waiting for a policeman or someone to help me,

for more than an hour, I have."

Smith stood looking down at her, his arms behind him, and in one

gloved hand swinging the cane.

"Where do you live, then?" he asked.

"Not a hundred steps from here, kind gentleman," she replied in the

monotonous voice; "but I can't move my left foot. It's only just

through the gates yonder."

"What!" snapped Smith, "on the wharf?"

"They let me have a room in the old building until it's let," she

explained. "Be helping a poor old woman, and God bless you."

"Come along, then!"

Stooping, Smith placed his arm around her shoulders, and assisted her

to her feet. She groaned as if in great pain, but gripped her red

bundle, and leaning heavily upon the supporting arm, hobbled off

across the bridge in the direction of the wharf gates at the end of

the lane.

Now at last a little action became possible, and having seen my friend

push open one of the gates and assist the old woman to enter, I crept

rapidly across the crazy floor, found the doorway, and, with little

noise, for I wore rubber-soled shoes, stole down the stairs into what

had formerly been the reception-room of the Joy-Shop, the malodorous

sanctum of the old Chinaman, John Ki.

Utter darkness prevailed there, but momentarily flicking the light of

a pocket-lamp upon the floor before me, I discovered the further steps

that were to be negotiated, and descended into the square yard which

gave access to the path skirting the creek.

The moonlight drew a sharp line of shadow along the wall of the house

above me, but the yard itself was a well of darkness. I stumbled under

the rotting brick archway, and stepped gingerly upon the muddy path

that I must follow. One hand pressed to the damp wall, I worked my way

cautiously along, for a false step had precipitated me into the foul

water of the creek. In this fashion and still enveloped by dense

shadows, I reached the angle of the building. Then--at risk of being

perceived, for the wharf and the river both were bathed in moonlight--

I peered along to the left....

Out onto the paved pathway communicating with the wharf came Smith,

shepherding his tottering charge. I was too far away to hear any

conversation that might take place between the two, but, unless Smith

gave the pre-arranged signal, I must approach no closer. Thus, as one

sees a drama upon the screen, I saw what now occurred--occurred with

dramatic, lightning swiftness.

Releasing Smith's arm, the old woman suddenly stepped back ... at the

instant that another figure, a repellent figure which approached,

stooping, apish, with a sort of loping gait, crossed from some spot

invisible to me, and sprang like a wild animal upon Smith's back!

It was a Chinaman, wearing a short loose garment of the smock pattern,

and having his head bare, so that I could see his pigtail coiled upon

his yellow crown. That he carried a cord, I perceived in the instant

of his spring, and that he had whipped it about Smith's throat with

unerring dexterity was evidenced by the one, short, strangled cry that

came from my friend's lips.

Then Smith was down, prone upon the crazy planking, with the ape-like

figure of the Chinaman perched between his shoulders--bending forward--

the wicked yellow fingers at work, tightening--tightening--tightening

the strangling-cord!

Uttering a loud cry of horror, I went racing along the gangway which

projected actually over the moving Thames waters, and gained the wharf.

But, swift as I had been, another had been swifter!

A tall figure (despite the brilliant moon, I doubted the evidence of

my sight), wearing a tweed overcoat and a soft felt hat with the brim

turned down, sprang up, from nowhere as it seemed, swooped upon the

horrible figure squatting, simianesque, between Smith's shoulder-blades,

and grasped him by the neck.

I pulled up shortly, one foot set upon the wharf. The new-comer was

the double of Nayland Smith!

Seemingly exerting no effort whatever, he lifted the strangler in that

remorseless grasp, so that the Chinaman's hands, after one quick

convulsive upward movement, hung limply beside him like the paws of a

rat in the grip of a terrier.

"You damned murderous swine!" I heard in a repressed, savage undertone.

"The knife failed, so now the cord has an innings! Go after your pal!"

Releasing one hand from the neck of the limp figure, the speaker

grasped the Chinaman by his loose, smock-like garment, swung him back,

once--a mighty swing--and hurled him far out into the river as one

might hurl a sack of rubbish!

CHAPTER XXIII

ARREST OF SAMARKAN

"As the high gods willed it," explained Nayland Smith, tenderly

massaging his throat, "Mr. Forsyth, having just left the docks,

chanced to pass along Three Colt Street on Wednesday night at exactly

the hour that \_I\_ was expected! The resemblance between us is rather

marked and the coincidence of dress completed the illusion. That

devilish Eurasian woman, Zarmi, who has escaped us again--of course

you recognized her?--made a very natural mistake. Mr. Forsyth, however,

made no mistake!"

I glanced at the chief officer of the \_Andaman\_, who sat in an armchair

in our new chambers, contentedly smoking a black cheroot.

"Heaven has blessed me with a pair of useful hands!" said the seaman,

grimly, extending his horny palms. "I've an old score against those

yellow swine; poor George and I were twins."

He referred to his brother who had been foully done to death by one of

the creatures of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"It beats me how Mr. Smith got on the track!" he added.

"Pure inspiration!" murmured Nayland Smith, glancing aside from the

siphon wherewith he now was busy. "The divine afflatus--and the same

whereby Petrie solved the Zagazig cryptogram!"

"But," concluded Forsyth, "I am indebted to you for an opportunity of

meeting the Chinese strangler, and sending him to join the Burmese

knife expert!"

Such, then, were the episodes that led to the arrest of M. Samarkan,

and my duty as narrator of these strange matters now bears me on to

the morning when Nayland Smith was hastily summoned to the prison into

which the villainous Greek had been cast.

We were shown immediately into the Governor's room and were invited by

that much disturbed official to be seated. The news which he had to

impart was sufficiently startling.

Samarkan was dead.

"I have Warder Morrison's statement here," said Colonel Warrington,

"if you will be good enough to read it----"

Nayland Smith rose abruptly, and began to pace up and down the little

office. Through the open window I had a glimpse of a stooping figure

in convict garb, engaged in liming the flower-beds of the prison

Governor's garden.

"I should like to see this Warder Morrison personally," snapped my

friend.

"Very good," replied the Governor, pressing a bell-push placed close

beside his table.

A man entered, to stand rigidly at attention just within the doorway.

"Send Morrison here," ordered Colonel Warrington.

The man saluted and withdrew. As the door was reclosed, the Colonel

sat drumming his fingers upon the table, Nayland Smith walked

restlessly about tugging at the lobe of his ear, and I absently

watched the convict gardener pursuing his toils. Shortly, sounded a

rap at the door, and--

"Come in," cried Colonel Warrington.

A man wearing warder's uniform appeared, saluted the Governor, and

stood glancing uneasily from the Colonel to Smith. The latter had

now ceased his perambulations, and, one elbow resting upon the

mantelpiece, was staring at Morrison--his penetrating gray eyes as

hard as steel. Colonel Warrington twisted his chair around, fixing

his monocle more closely in its place. He had the wiry white mustache

and fiery red face of the old-style Anglo-Indian officer.

"Morrison," he said, "Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith has some

questions to put to you."

The man's uneasiness palpably was growing by leaps and bounds. He was

a tall and intelligent-looking fellow of military build, though spare

for his height and of an unhealthy complexion. His eyes were curiously

dull, and their pupils interested me, professionally, from the very

moment of his entrance.

"You were in charge of the prisoner Samarkan?" began Smith harshly.

"Yes, sir," Morrison replied.

"Were you the first to learn of his death?"

"I was, sir. I looked through the grille in the door and saw him lying

on the floor of the cell."

"What time was it?"

"Half-past four A.M."

"What did you do?"

"I went into the cell and then sent for the head warder."

"You realized at once that Samarkan was dead?"

"At once, yes."

"Were you surprised?"

Nayland Smith subtly changed the tone of his voice in asking the last

question, and it was evident that the veiled significance of the words

was not lost upon Morrison.

"Well, sir," he began, and cleared his throat nervously.

"Yes, or no!" snapped Smith.

Morrison still hesitated, and I saw his underlip twitch. Nayland Smith,

taking two long strides, stood immediately in front of him, glaring

grimly into his face.

"This is your chance," he said emphatically; "I shall not give you

another. You had met Samarkan before?"

Morrison hung his head for a moment, clenching and unclenching his

fists; then he looked up swiftly, and the light of a new resolution

was in his eyes.

"I'll take the chance, sir," he said, speaking with some emotion, "and

I hope, sir"--turning momentarily to Colonel Warrington--"that you'll

be as lenient as you can; for I didn't know there was any harm in what

I did."

"Don't expect any leniency from me!" cried the Colonel. "If there has

been a breach of discipline there will be punishment, rely upon it!"

"I admit the breach of discipline," pursued the man doggedly; "but I

want to say, here and now, that I've no more idea than anybody else

how the----"

Smith snapped his fingers irritably.

"The facts--the facts!" he demanded. "What you \_don't\_ know cannot

help us!"

"Well, sir," said Morrison, clearing his throat again, "when the

prisoner, Samarkan, was admitted, and I put him safely into his cell,

he told me that he suffered from heart trouble, that he'd had an

attack when he was arrested and that he thought he was threatened

with another, which might kill him----"

"One moment," interrupted Smith, "is this confirmed by the police

officer who made the arrest?"

"It is, sir," replied Colonel Warrington, swinging his chair around

and consulting some papers upon his table. "The prisoner was overcome

by faintness when the officer showed him the warrant and asked to be

given some cognac from the decanter which stood in his room. This was

administered, and he then entered the cab which the officer had

waiting. He was taken to Bow Street, remanded, and brought here in

accordance with some one's instructions."

"\_My instructions\_" said Smith. "Go on, Morrison."

"He told me," continued Morrison more steadily, "that he suffered from

something that sounded to me like apoplexy."

"Catalepsy!" I suggested, for I was beginning to see light.

"That's it, sir! He said he was afraid of being buried alive! He asked

me, as a favor, if he should die in prison to go to a friend of his

and get a syringe with which to inject some stuff that would do away

with all chance of his coming to life again after burial."

"You had no right to talk to the prisoner!" roared Colonel Warrington.

"I know that, sir, but you'll admit that the circumstances were peculiar.

Anyway, he died in the night, sure enough, and from heart failure,

according to the doctor. I managed to get a couple of hours leave in

the evening, and I went and fetched the syringe and a little tube of

yellow stuff."

"Do you understand, Petrie?" cried Nayland Smith, his eyes blazing

with excitement. "Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"It's more than I do, sir," continued Morrison, "but as I was

explaining, I brought the little syringe back with me and I filled it

from the tube. The body was lying in the mortuary, which you've seen,

and the door not being locked, it was easy for me to slip in there for

a moment. I didn't fancy the job, but it was soon done. I threw the

syringe and the tube over the wall into the lane outside, as I'd been

told to do.

"What part of the wall?" asked Smith.

"Behind the mortuary."

"That's where they were waiting!" I cried excitedly. "The building

used as a mortuary is quite isolated, and it would not be a difficult

matter for some one hiding in the lane outside to throw one of those

ladders of silk and bamboo across the top of the wall."

"But, my good sir," interrupted the Governor irascibly, "whilst I

admit the possibility to which you allude, I do not admit that a dead

man, and a heavy one at that, can be carried up a ladder of silk and

bamboo! Yet, on the evidence of my own eyes, the body of the prisoner,

Samarkan, was removed from the mortuary last night!"

Smith signaled to me to pursue the subject no further; and indeed I

realized that it would have been no easy matter to render the amazing

truth evident to a man of the Colonel's type of mind. But to me the

facts of the case were now clear enough.

That Fu-Manchu possessed a preparation for producing artificial

catalepsy, of a sort indistinguishable from death, I was well aware.

A dose of this unknown drug had doubtless been contained in the cognac

(if, indeed, the decanter had held cognac) that the prisoner had drunk

at the time of his arrest. The "yellow stuff" spoken of by Morrison I

recognized as the antidote (another secret of the brilliant Chinese

doctor), a portion of which I had once, some years before, actually

had in my possession. The "dead man" had not been carried up the

ladder; he had climbed up!

"Now, Morrison," snapped Nayland Smith, "you have acted wisely thus

far. Make a clean breast of it. How much were you paid for the job?"

"Twenty pounds, sir" answered the man promptly, "and I'd have done it

for less, because I could see no harm in it, the prisoner being dead,

and this his last request."

"And who paid you?"

Now we were come to the nub of the matter, as the change in the man's

face revealed. He hesitated momentarily, and Colonel Warrington

brought his fist down on the table with a bang. Morrison made a sort

of gesture of resignation at that, and--

"When I was in the Army, sir, stationed at Cairo," he said slowly, "I

regret to confess that I formed a drug habit."

"Opium?" snapped Smith.

"No, sir, hashish."

"Good God! Go on."

"There's a place in Soho, just off Frith Street, where hashish is

supplied, and I go there sometimes. Mr. Samarkan used to come, and

bring people with him--from the New Louvre Hotel, I believe. That's

where I met him."

"The exact address?" demanded Smith.

"Café de l'Egypte. But the hashish is only sold upstairs, and no one

is allowed up that isn't known personally to Ismail."

"Who is this Ismail?"

"The proprietor of the café. He's a Greek Jew of Salonica. An old

woman used to attend to the customers upstairs, but during the last

few months a young one has sometimes taken her place."

"What is she like?" I asked eagerly.

"She has very fine eyes, and that's about all I can tell you, sir,

because she wears a yashmak. Last night there were two women there,

both veiled, though."

"Two women!"

Hope and fear entered my heart. That Kâramaneh was again in the

power of the Chinese Doctor I knew to my sorrow. Could it be that

the Café de l'Egypte was the place of her captivity?

CHAPTER XXIV

CAFÉ DE L'EGYPTE

I could see that Nayland Smith counted the escape of the prisoner but

a trivial matter by comparison with the discovery to which it had led

us. That the Soho café should prove to be, if not the headquarters at

least a regular resort of Dr. Fu-Manchu, was not too much to hope. The

usefulness of such a haunt was evident enough, since it might

conveniently be employed as a place of rendezvous for Orientals--and

furthermore enable the cunning Chinaman to establish relations with

persons likely to prove of service to him.

Formerly, he had used an East End opium den for this purpose, and,

later, the resort known as the Joy-Shop. Soho, hitherto, had remained

outside the radius of his activity, but that he should have embraced

it at last was not surprising; for Soho is the Montmartre of London

and a land of many secrets.

"Why," demanded Nayland Smith, "have I never been told of the existence

of this place?"

"That's simple enough," answered Inspector Weymouth. "Although we knew

of this Café de l'Egypte, we have never had the slightest trouble

there. It's a Bohemian resort, where members of the French Colony,

some of the Chelsea art people, professional models, and others of

that sort, foregather at night. I've been there myself as a matter of

fact, and I've seen people well known in the artistic world come in.

It has much the same clientele as, say, the Café Royal, with a rather

heavier sprinkling of Hindu students, Japanese, and so forth. It's

celebrated for Turkish coffee."

"What do you know of this Ismail?"

"Nothing much. He's a Levantine Jew."

"And something more!" added Smith, surveying himself in the mirror,

and turning to nod his satisfaction to the well-known perruquier whose

services are sometimes requisitioned by the police authorities.

We were ready for our visit to the Café de l'Egypte, and Smith having

deemed it inadvisable that we should appear there openly, we had been

transformed, under the adroit manipulation of Foster, into a pair of

Futurists oddly unlike our actual selves. No wigs, no false mustaches

had been employed; a change of costume and a few deft touches of some

water-color paint had rendered us unrecognizable by our most intimate

friends.

It was all very fantastic, very reminiscent of Christmas charades, but

the farce had a grim, murderous undercurrent; the life of one dearer

to me than life itself hung upon our success; the swamping of the White

world by Yellow hordes might well be the price of our failure.

Weymouth left us at the corner of Frith Street. This was no more than

a reconnaissance, but--

"I shall be within hail if I'm wanted," said the burly detective; and

although we stood not in Chinatown but in the heart of Bohemian London,

with popular restaurants about us, I was glad to know that we had so

stanch an ally in reserve.

The shadow of the great Chinaman was upon me. That strange,

subconscious voice, with which I had become familiar in the past,

awoke within me to-night. Not by logic, but by prescience, I knew that

the Yellow doctor was near.

Two minutes walk brought us to the door of the café. The upper half

was of glass, neatly curtained, as were the windows on either side of

it; and above the establishment appeared the words: "Café de l'Egypte."

Between the second and third word was inserted a gilded device

representing the crescent of Islâm.

We entered. On our right was a room furnished with marble-topped

tables, cane-seated chairs and plush-covered lounges set against the

walls. The air was heavy with tobacco smoke; evidently the café was

full, although the night was young.

Smith immediately made for the upper end of the room. It was not large,

and at first glance I thought that there was no vacant place. Presently,

however, I espied two unoccupied chairs; and these we took, finding

ourselves facing a pale, bespectacled young man, with long, fair hair

and faded eyes, whose companion, a bold brunette, was smoking one of

the largest cigarettes I had ever seen, in a gold and amber cigar-holder.

A very commonplace Swiss waiter took our orders for coffee, and we

began discreetly to survey our surroundings. The only touch of Oriental

color thus far perceptible in the café de l'Egypte was provided by a

red-capped Egyptian behind a narrow counter, who presided over the

coffee pots. The patrons of the establishment were in every way typical

of Soho, and in the bulk differed not at all from those of the better

known café restaurants.

There were several Easterns present; but Smith, having given each of

them a searching glance, turned to me with a slight shrug of

disappointment. Coffee being placed before us, we sat sipping the thick,

sugary beverage, smoking cigarettes and vainly seeking for some clue

to guide us to the inner sanctuary consecrated to hashish. It was

maddening to think that Kâramaneh might be somewhere concealed in

the building, whilst I sat there, inert amongst this gathering whose

conversation was of abnormalities in art, music, and literature.

Then, suddenly, the pale young man seated opposite paid his bill, and

with a word of farewell to his companion, went out of the café. He

did not make his exit by the door through which we entered, but passed

up the crowded room to the counter whereat the Egyptian presided. From

some place hidden in the rear, emerged a black-haired, swarthy man,

with whom the other exchanged a few words. The pale young artist raised

his wide-brimmed hat, and was gone--through a curtained doorway on the

left of the counter.

As he opened it, I had a glimpse of a narrow court beyond; then the

door was closed again ... and I found myself thinking of the peculiar

eyes of the departed visitor. Even through the thick pebbles of his

spectacles, although for some reason I had thought little of the

matter at the time, his oddly contracted pupils were noticeable. As

the girl, in turn, rose and left the café--but by the ordinary

door--I turned to Smith.

"That man ..." I began, and paused.

Smith was watching covertly, a Hindu seated at a neighboring table,

who was about to settle his bill. Standing up, the Hindu made for the

coffee counter, the swarthy man appeared out of the background--and

the Asiatic visitor went out by the door opening into the court.

One quick glance Smith gave me, and raised his hand for the waiter.

A few minutes later we were out in the street again.

"We must find our way to that court!" snapped my friend. "Let us try

back, I noted a sort of alley-way which we passed just before reaching

the café."

"You think the hashish den is in some adjoining building?"

"I don't know where it is, Petrie, but I know the way to it!"

Into a narrow, gloomy court we plunged, hemmed in by high walls, and

followed it for ten yards or more. An even narrower and less inviting

turning revealed itself on the left. We pursued our way, and presently

found ourselves at the back of the Café de l'Egypte.

"There's the door," I said.

It opened into a tiny cul de sac, flanked by dilapidated hoardings,

and no other door of any kind was visible in the vicinity. Nayland

Smith stood tugging at the lobe of his ear almost savagely.

"Where the devil do they go?" he whispered.

Even as he spoke the words, came a gleam of light through the upper

curtained part of the door, and I distinctly saw the figure of a man

in silhouette.

"Stand back!" snapped Smith.

We crouched back against the dirty wall of the court, and watched a

strange thing happen. The back door of the Café de l'Egypte opened

outward, simultaneously a door, hitherto invisible, set at right

angles in the hoarding adjoining, opened \_inward!\_

A man emerged from the café and entered the secret doorway. As he did

so, the café door swung back ... and closed the door in the hoarding!

"Very good!" muttered Nayland Smith. "Our friend Ismail, behind the

counter, moves some lever which causes the opening of one door

automatically to open the other. Failing his kindly offices, the second

exit from the Café de l'Egypte is innocent enough. Now--what is the

next move?"

"I have an idea, Smith!" I cried. "According to Morrison, the place in

which the hashish may be obtained has no windows but is lighted from

above. No doubt it was built for a studio and has a glass roof.

Therefore----"

"Come along!" snapped Smith, grasping my arm; "you have solved the

difficulty, Petrie."

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOUSE OF HASHISH

Along the leads from Frith Street we worked our perilous way. From the

top landing of a French restaurant we had gained access, by means of

a trap, to the roof of the building. Now, the busy streets of Soho were

below me, and I clung dizzily to telephone standards and smoke stacks,

rarely venturing to glance downward upon the cosmopolitan throng,

surging, dwarfish, in the lighted depths.

Sometimes the bulky figure of Inspector Weymouth would loom up

grotesquely against the star-sprinkled blue, as he paused to take

breath; the next moment Nayland Smith would be leading the way again,

and I would find myself contemplating some sheer well of blackness,

with nausea threatening me because it had to be negotiated.

None of these gaps were more than a long stride from side to side; but

the sense of depth conveyed in the muffled voices and dimmed footsteps

from the pavements far below was almost overpowering. Indeed, I am

convinced that for my part I should never have essayed that nightmare

journey were it not that the musical voice of Kâramaneh seemed to be

calling to me, her little white hands to be seeking mine, blindly, in

the darkness.

That we were close to a haunt of the dreadful Chinamen I was

persuaded; therefore my hatred and my love cooperated to lend me a

coolness and address which otherwise I must have lacked.

"Hullo!" cried Smith, who was leading--"what now?"

We had crept along the crown of a sloping roof and were confronted by

the blank wall of a building which rose a story higher than that

adjoining it. It was crowned by an iron railing, showing blackly

against the sky. I paused, breathing heavily, and seated astride that

dizzy perch. Weymouth was immediately behind me, and--

"It's the Café de l'Egypte, Mr. Smith!" he said, "If you'll look up,

you'll see the reflection of the lights shining through the glass roof."

Vaguely I discerned Nayland Smith rising to his feet.

"Be careful!" I said. "For God's sake don't slip!"

"Take my hand," he snapped energetically.

I stretched forward and grasped his hand. As I did so, he slid down

the slope on the right, away from the street, and hung perilously for

a moment over the very cul de sac upon which the secret door opened.

"Good!" he muttered "There is, as I had hoped, a window lighting the

top of the staircase. Ssh!--ssh!"

His grip upon my hand tightened; and there aloft, above the teemful

streets of Soho, I sat listening ... whilst very faint and muffled

footsteps sounded upon an uncarpeted stair, a door banged, and all

was silent again, save for the ceaseless turmoil far below.

"Sit tight, and catch!" rapped Smith.

Into my extended hands he swung his boots, fastened together by the

laces! Then, ere I could frame any protest, he disengaged his hand

from mine, and pressing his body close against the angle of the

building, worked his way around to the staircase window, which was

invisible from where I crouched.

"Heavens!" muttered Weymouth, close to my ear, "I can never travel

that road!"

"Nor I!" was my scarcely audible answer.

In a anguish of fearful anticipation I listened for the cry and the

dull thud which should proclaim the fate of my intrepid friend; but

no such sounds came to me. Some thirty seconds passed in this fashion,

when a subdued call from above caused me to start and look aloft.

Nayland Smith was peering down from the railing on the roof.

"Mind your head!" he warned--and over the rail swung the end of a

light wooden ladder, lowering it until it rested upon the crest

astride of which I sat.

"Up you come!--then Weymouth!"

Whilst Smith held the top firmly, I climbed up rung by rung, not

daring to think of what lay below.

My relief when at last I grasped the railing, climbed over, and found

myself upon a wooden platform, was truly inexpressible.

"Come on, Weymouth!" rapped Nayland Smith. "This ladder has to be

lowered back down the trap before another visitor arrives!"

Taking short, staccato breaths at every step, Inspector Weymouth

ascended, ungainly, that frail and moving stair. Arrived beside me,

he wiped the perspiration from his face and forehead.

"I wouldn't do it again for a hundred pounds!" he said hoarsely.

"You don't have to!" snapped Smith.

Back he hauled the ladder, shouldered it, and stepping to a square

opening in one corner of the rickety platform, lowered it cautiously

down.

"Have you a knife with a corkscrew in it?" he demanded.

Weymouth had one, which he produced. Nayland Smith screwed it into

the weather-worn frame, and by that means reclosed the trapdoor

softly, then--

"Look," he said, "there is the house of hashish!"

CHAPTER XXVI

"THE DEMON'S SELF"

Through the glass panes of the skylight I looked down upon a scene so

bizarre that my actual environment became blotted out, and I was

mentally translated to Cairo--to that quarter of Cairo immediately

surrounding the famous Square of the Fountain--to those indescribable

streets, wherefrom arises the perfume of deathless evil, wherein, to

the wailing, luresome music of the reed pipe, painted dancing-girls

sway in the wild abandon of dances that were ancient when Thebes was

the City of a Hundred Gates; I seemed to stand again in el Wasr.

The room below was rectangular, and around three of the walls were

divans strewn with garish cushions, whilst highly colored Eastern rugs

were spread about the floor. Four lamps swung on chains, two from

either of the beams which traversed the apartment. They were fine

examples of native perforated brasswork.

Upon the divans some eight or nine men were seated, fully half of whom

were Orientals or half-castes. Before each stood a little inlaid table

bearing a brass tray; and upon the trays were various boxes, some

apparently containing sweetmeats, other cigarettes. One or two of the

visitors smoked curious, long-stemmed pipes and sipped coffee.

Even as I leaned from the platform, surveying that incredible scene

(incredible in a street of Soho), another devotee of hashish entered--

a tall, distinguished-looking man, wearing a light coat over his

evening dress.

"Gad!" whispered Smith, beside me--"Sir Byngham Pyne of the India

Office! You see, Petrie! You see! This place is a lure. My God! ..."

He broke off, as I clutched wildly at his arm.

The last arrival having taken his seat in a corner of the divan, two

heavy curtains draped before an opening at one end of the room parted,

and a girl came out, carrying a tray such as already reposed before

each of the other men in the room.

She wore a dress of dark lilac-colored gauze, banded about with gold

tissue and embroidered with gold thread and pearls; and around her

shoulders floated, so ethereally that she seemed to move in a violet

cloud; a scarf of Delhi muslin. A white yashmak trimmed with gold

tissue concealed the lower part of her face.

My heart throbbed wildly; I seemed to be choking. By the wonderful

hair alone I must have known her, by the great, brilliant eyes, by

the shape of those slim white ankles, by every movement of that

exquisite form. It was Kâramaneh!

I sprang madly back from the rail ... and Smith had my arm in an iron

grip.

"Where are you going?" he snapped.

"Where am I going?" I cried. "Do you think--"

"What do you propose to do?" he interrupted harshly. "Do you know so

little of the resources of Dr. Fu-Manchu that you would throw yourself

blindly into that den? Damn it all, man! I know what you suffer!--but

wait--wait. We must not act rashly; our plans must be well considered."

He drew me back to my former post and clapped his hand on my shoulder

sympathetically. Clutching the rail like a man frenzied, as indeed I

was, I looked down into that infamous den again, striving hard for

composure.

Kâramaneh listlessly placed the tray upon the little table before Sir

Byngham Pyne and withdrew without vouchsafing him a single glance in

acknowledgment of his unconcealed admiration.

A moment later, above the dim clamor of London far below, there crept

to my ears a sound which completed the magical quality of the scene,

rendering that sky platform on a roof of Soho a magical carpet bearing

me to the golden Orient. This sound was the wailing of a reed pipe.

"The company is complete," murmured Smith. "I had expected this."

Again the curtains parted, and a \_ghazeeyeh\_ glided out into the room.

She wore a white dress, clinging closely to her figure from shoulders

to hips, where it was clasped by an ornate girdle, and a skirt of

sky-blue gauze which clothed her as Io was clothed of old. Her arms

were covered with gold bangles, and gold bands were clasped about her

ankles. Her jet-black, frizzy hair was unconfined and without

ornament, and she wore a sort of highly colored scarf so arranged that

it effectually concealed the greater part of her face, but served to

accentuated the brightness of the great flashing eyes. She had

unmistakable beauty of a sort, but how different from the sweet

witchery of Kâramaneh!

With a bold, swinging grace she walked down the center of the room,

swaying her arms from side to side and snapping her fingers.

"Zarmi!" exclaimed Smith.

But his exclamation was unnecessary, for already I had recognized the

evil Eurasian who was so efficient a servant of the Chinese doctor.

The wailing of the pipes continued, and now faintly I could detect the

throbbing of a \_darabûkeh.\_ This was el Wasr indeed. The dance

commenced, its every phase followed eagerly by the motley clientele

of the hashish house. Zarmi danced with an insolent nonchalance that

nevertheless displayed her barbaric beauty to greatest advantage. She

was lithe as a serpent, graceful as a young panther, another Lamia

come to damn the souls of men with those arts denounced in a long dead

age by Apolonius of Tyana.

"She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf,

Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self...."

Entranced against my will, I watched the Eurasian until, the barbaric

dance completed, she ran from the room, and the curtains concealed her

from view. How my mind was torn between hope and fear that I should

see Kâramaneh again! How I longed for one more glimpse of her, yet

loathed the thought of her presence in that infamous house.

She was a captive; of that there could be no doubt, a captive in the

hands of the giant criminal whose wiles were endless, whose resources

were boundless, whose intense cunning had enabled him, for years, to

weave his nefarious plots in the very heart of civilization, and

remain immune. Suddenly--

"That woman is a sorceress!" muttered Nayland Smith. "There is about

her something serpentine, at once repelling and fascinating. It would

be of interest, Petrie, to learn what State secrets have been filched

from the brains of habitues of this den, and interesting to know from

what unsuspected spy-hole Fu-Manchu views his nightly catch. If ..."

His voice died away, in a most curious fashion. I have since thought

that here was a case of true telepathy. For, as Smith spoke of

Fu-Manchu's spy-hole, the idea leapt instantly to my mind that \_this\_

was it--this strange platform upon which we stood!

I drew back from the rail, turned, stared at Smith. I read in his

face that our suspicions were identical. Then--

"Look! Look!" whispered Weymouth.

He was gazing at the trapdoor--which was slowly rising; inch by inch ...

inch by inch ... Fascinatedly, raptly, we all gazed. A head appeared

in the opening--and some vague, reflected light revealed two long,

narrow, slightly oblique eyes watching us. They were brilliantly green.

"By God!" came in a mighty roar from Weymouth. "It's Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

As one man we leapt for the trap. It dropped, with a resounding bang--

and I distinctly heard a bolt shot home.

A gutteral voice--the unmistakable, unforgettable voice of Fu-Manchu--

sounded dimly from below. I turned and sprang back to the rail of the

platform, peering down into the hashish house. The occupants of the

divans were making for the curtained doorway. Some, who seemed to be

in a state of stupor, were being assisted by the others and by the

man, Ismail, who had now appeared upon the scene.

Of Kâramaneh, Zarmi, or Fu-Manchu there was no sign.

Suddenly, the lights were extinguished.

"This is maddening!" cried Nayland Smith--"maddening! No doubt they

have some other exit, some hiding-place--and they are slipping through

our hands!"

Inspector Weymouth blew a shrill blast upon his whistle, and Smith,

running to the rail of the platform, began to shatter the panes of the

skylight with his foot.

"That's hopeless, sir!" cried Weymouth. "You'd be torn to pieces on

the jagged glass."

Smith desisted, with a savage exclamation, and stood beating his right

fist into the palm of his left hand, and glaring madly at the Scotland

Yard man.

"I know I'm to blame," admitted Weymouth; "but the words were out

before I knew I'd spoken. Ah!"--as an answering whistle came from

somewhere in the street below. "But will they ever find us?"

He blew again shrilly. Several whistles replied ... and a wisp of smoke

floated up from the shattered pane of the skylight.

"I can smell \_petrol\_!" muttered Weymouth.

An ever-increasing roar, not unlike that of an approaching storm at

sea, came from the streets beneath. Whistles skirled, remotely and

intimately, and sometimes one voice, sometimes another, would detach

itself from this stormy background with weird effect. Somewhere deep

in the bowels of the hashish house there went on ceaselessly a

splintering and crashing as though a determined assault were being

made upon a door. A light shone up through the skylight.

Back once more to the rail I sprang, looked down into the room below--

and saw a sight never to be forgotten.

Passing from divan to curtained door, from piles of cushions to

stacked-up tables, and bearing a flaming torch hastily improvised out

of a roll of newspaper, was Dr. Fu-Manchu. Everything inflammable in

the place had been soaked with petrol, and, his gaunt, yellow face

lighted by the evergrowing conflagration, so that truly it seemed not

the face of a man, but that of a demon of the hells, the Chinese

doctor ignited point after point....

"Smith!" I screamed, "we are trapped! that fiend means to burn us alive!"

"And the place will flare like matchwood! It's touch and go this time,

Petrie! To drop to the sloping roof underneath would mean almost

certain death on the pavement...."

I dragged my pistol from my pocket and began wildly to fire shot after

shot into the holocaust below. But the awful Chinaman had escaped--

probably by some secret exit reserved for his own use; for certainly

he must have known that escape into the court was now cut off.

Flames were beginning to hiss through the skylight. A tremendous

crackling and crashing told of the glass destroyed. Smoke spurted up

through the cracks of the boarding upon which we stood--and a great

shout came from the crowd in the streets....

In the distance--a long, long way off, it seemed--was born a new note

in the stormy human symphony. It grew in volume, it seemed to be

sweeping down upon us--nearer--nearer--nearer. Now it was in the

streets immediately adjoining the Café de l'Egypte ... and now,

blessed sound! it culminated in a mighty surging cheer.

"The fire-engines," said Weymouth coolly--and raised himself on to the

lower rail, for the platform was growing uncomfortably hot.

Tongues of fire licked out, venomously, from beneath my feet. I leapt

for the railing in turn, and sat astride it ... as one end of the

flooring burst into flame.

The heat from the blazing room above which we hung suspended was now

all but insupportable, and the fumes threatened to stifle us. My head

seemed to be bursting; my throat and lungs were consumed by internal

fires.

"Merciful heavens!" whispered Smith. "Will they reach us in time?"

"Not if they don't get here within the next thirty seconds!" answered

Weymouth grimly--and changed his position, in order to avoid a tongue

of flame that hungrily sought to reach him.

Nayland Smith turned and looked me squarely in the eyes. Words

trembled on his tongue; but those words were never spoken ... for a

brass helmet appeared suddenly out of the smoke banks, followed almost

immediately by a second....

"Quick, sir! this way! Jump! I'll catch you!"

Exactly what followed I never knew; but there was a mighty burst of

cheering, a sense of tension released, and it became a task less

agonizing to breathe.

Feeling very dazed, I found myself in the heart of a huge, excited

crowd, with Weymouth beside me, and Nayland Smith holding my arm.

Vaguely, I heard;--

"They have the man Ismail, but ..."

A hollow crash drowned the end of the sentence. A shower of sparks

shot up into the night's darkness high above our heads.

"That's the platform gone!"

CHAPTER XXVII

ROOM WITH THE GOLDEN DOOR

One night early in the following week I sat at work upon my notes

dealing with our almost miraculous escape from the blazing hashish

house when the clock of St. Paul's began to strike midnight.

I paused in my work, leaning back wearily and wondering what detained

Nayland Smith so late. Some friends from Burma had carried him off to

a theater, and in their good company I had thought him safe enough;

yet, with the omnipresent menace of Fu-Manchu hanging over our heads,

always I doubted, always I feared, if my friend should chance to be

delayed abroad at night.

What a world of unreality was mine, in those days! Jostling, as I did,

commonplace folk in commonplace surroundings, I yet knew myself removed

from them, knew myself all but alone in my knowledge of the great and

evil man, whose presence in England had diverted my life into these

strange channels.

But, despite of all my knowledge, and despite the infinitely greater

knowledge and wider experience of Nayland Smith, what did I know, what

did he know, of the strange organization called the Si-Fan, and of its

most formidable member, Dr. Fu-Manchu?

Where did the dreadful Chinaman hide, with his murderers, his poisons,

and his nameless death agents? What roof in broad England sheltered

Kâramaneh, the companion of my dreams, the desire of every waking hour?

I uttered a sigh of despair, when, to my unbounded astonishment, there

came a loud rap upon the window pane!

Leaping up, I crossed to the window, threw it widely open and leant out,

looking down into the court below. It was deserted. In no other window

visible to me was any light to be seen, and no living thing moved in

the shadows beneath. The clamor of Fleet Street's diminishing traffic

came dimly to my ears; the last stroke from St. Paul's quivered through

the night.

What was the meaning of the sound which had disturbed me? Surely I

could not have imagined it? Yet, right, left, above and below, from the

cloisteresque shadows on the east of the court to the blank wall of the

building on the west, no living thing stirred.

Quietly, I reclosed the window, and stood by it for a moment listening.

Nothing occurred, and I returned to the writing-table, puzzled but in

no sense alarmed. I resumed the seemingly interminable record of the

Si-Fan mysteries, and I had just taken up my pen, when ... two loud

raps sounded upon the pane behind me.

In a trice I was at the window, had thrown it open, and was craning

out. Practical joking was not characteristic of Nayland Smith, and I

knew of none other likely to take such a liberty. As before, the court

below proved to be empty....

Some one was softly rapping at the door of the chambers!

I turned swiftly from the open window; and now, came \_fear\_.

Momentarily, the icy finger of panic touched me, for I thought myself

invested upon all sides. Who could this late caller be, this midnight

visitor who rapped, ghostly, in preference to ringing the bell?

From the table drawer I took out a Browning pistol, slipped it into my

pocket and crossed to the narrow hallway. It was in darkness, but I

depressed the switch, lighting the lamp. Toward the closed door I looked

--as the soft rapping was repeated.

I advanced; then hesitated, and, strung up to a keen pitch of fearful

anticipation, stood there in doubt. The silence remained unbroken for

the space, perhaps of half a minute. Then again came the ghostly rapping.

"Who's there?" I cried loudly.

Nothing stirred outside the door, and still I hesitated. To some who

read, my hesitancy may brand me childishly timid; but I, who had met

many of the dreadful creatures of Dr. Fu-Manchu, had good reason to

fear whomsoever or whatsoever rapped at midnight upon my door. Was I

likely to forget the great half-human ape, with the strength of four

lusty men, which once he had loosed upon us?--had I not cause to

remember his Burmese dacoits and Chinese stranglers?

No, I had just cause for dread, as I fully recognized when, snatching

the pistol from my pocket, I strode forward, flung wide the door, and

stood peering out into the black gulf of the stairhead.

Nothing, no one, appeared!

Conscious of a longing to cry out--if only that the sound of my own

voice might reassure me--I stood listening. The silence was complete.

"Who's there?" I cried again, and loudly enough to arrest the attention

of the occupant of the chambers opposite if he chanced to be at home.

None replied; and finding this phantom silence more nerve-racking than

any clamor, I stepped outside the door--and my heart gave a great leap,

then seemed to remain inert, in my breast....

Right and left of me, upon either side of the doorway, stood a dim

figure: I had walked deliberately into a trap!

The shock of the discovery paralyzed my mind for one instant. In the

next, and with the sinister pair closing swiftly upon me, I stepped

back--I stepped into the arms of some third assailant, who must have

entered the chambers by way of the open window and silently crept up

behind me!

So much I realized, and no more. A bag, reeking of some hashish-like

perfume, was clapped over my head and pressed firmly against mouth

and nostrils. I felt myself to be stifling--dying--and dropping into

a bottomless pit.

When I opened my eyes I failed for some time to realize that I was

conscious in the true sense of the word, that I was really awake.

I sat upon a bench covered with a red carpet, in a fair-sized room,

very simply furnished, in the Chinese manner, but having a two-leaved,

gilded door, which was shut. At the further end of this apartment was

a dais some three feet high, also carpeted with red, and upon it was

placed a very large cushion covered with a tiger skin.

Seated cross-legged upon the cushion was a Chinaman of most majestic

appearance. His countenance was truly noble and gracious and he was

dressed in a yellow robe lined with marten-fur. His hair, which was

thickly splashed with gray, was confined upon the top of his head by

three golden combs, and a large diamond was suspended from his left

ear. A pearl-embroidered black cap, surmounted by the red coral ball

denoting the mandarin's rank, lay upon a second smaller cushion

beside him.

Leaning back against the wall, I stared at his personage with a

dreadful fixity, for I counted him the figment of a disarranged mind.

But palpably he remained before me, fanning himself complacently, and

watching me with every mark of kindly interest. Evidently perceiving

that I was fully alive to my surroundings, the Chinaman addressed a

remark to me in a tongue quite unfamiliar.

I shook my head dazedly.

"Ah," he commented in French, "you do not speak my language."

"I do not," I answered, also in French, "but since it seems we have

one common tongue, what is the meaning of the outrage to which I have

been subjected, and who are you?"

As I spoke the words I rose to my feet, but was immediately attacked

by vertigo, which compelled me to resume my seat upon the bench.

"Compose yourself," said the Chinaman, taking a pinch of snuff from a

silver vase which stood convenient to his hand. "I have been compelled

to adopt certain measures in order to bring about this interview. In

China, such measures are not unusual, but I recognize that they are

out of accordance with your English ideas."

"Emphatically they are!" I replied.

The placid manner of this singularly imposing old man rendered proper

resentment difficult. A sense of futility, and of unreality, claimed

me; I felt that this was a dream-world, governed by dream-laws.

"You have good reason," he continued, calmly raising the pinch of

snuff to his nostrils, "good reason to distrust all that is Chinese.

Therefore, when I despatched my servants to your abode (knowing you

to be alone) I instructed them to observe every law of courtesy,

compatible with the Sure Invitation. Hence, I pray you, absolve me,

for I intended no offense."

Words failed me altogether; wonder succeeded wonder! What was coming?

What did it all mean?

"I have selected you, rather than Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith,"

continued the mandarin, "as the recipient of those secrets which I am

about to impart, for the reason that your friend might possibly be

acquainted with my appearance. I will confess there was a time when I

must have regarded you with animosity, as one who sought the

destruction of the most ancient and potent organization in the world--

the Si-Fan."

As he uttered the words he raised his right hand and touched his

forehead, his mouth, and finally his breast--a gesture reminiscent of

that employed by Moslems.

"But my first task is to assure you," he resumed, "that the activities

of that Order are in no way inimical to yourself, your country or your

King. The extensive ramifications of the Order have recently been

employed by a certain Dr. Fu-Manchu for his own ends, and, since he

was (I admit it) a high official, a schism has been created in our

ranks. Exactly a month ago, sentence of death was passed upon him by

the Sublime Prince, and since I myself must return immediately to China,

I look to Mr. Nayland Smith to carry out that sentence."

I said nothing; I remained bereft of the power of speech.

"The Si-Fan," he added, repeating the gesture with his hand, "disown

Dr. Fu-Manchu and his servants; do with them what you will. In this

envelope"--he held up a sealed package--"is information which should

prove helpful to Mr. Smith. I have now a request to make. You were

conveyed here in the garments which your wore at the time that my

servants called upon you." (I was hatless and wore red leathern

slippers.) "An overcoat and a hat can doubtless be found to suit you,

temporarily, and my request is that you close your eyes until

permission is given to open them."

Is there any one of my readers in doubt respecting my reception of

this proposal? Remember my situation, remember the bizarre happening

that had led up to it; remember, too, ere judging me, that whilst I

could not doubt the unseen presence of Chinamen unnumbered surrounding

that strange apartment with the golden door, I had not the remotest

clue to guide me in determining where it was situated. Since the

duration of my unconsciousness was immeasurable, the place in which I

found myself might have been anywhere, within say, thirty miles of

Fleet Street!

"I agree," I said.

The mandarin bowed composedly.

"Kindly close your eyes, Dr. Petrie," he requested, "and fear nothing.

No danger threatens you."

I obeyed. Instantly sounded the note of a gong, and I became aware

that the golden door was open. A soft voice, evidently that of a

cultured Chinaman, spoke quite close to my ear--

"Keep your eyes tightly closed, please, and I will help you on with

this coat. The envelope you will find in the pocket and here is a

tweed cap. Now take my hand."

Wearing the borrowed garments, I was led from the room, along a

passage, down a flight of thickly carpeted stairs, and so out of the

house into the street. Faint evidences of remote traffic reached my

ears as I was assisted into a car and placed in a cushioned corner.

The car moved off, proceeded for some distance; then--

"Allow me to help you to descend," said the soft voice. "You may open

your eyes in thirty seconds."

I was assisted from the step on to the pavement--and I heard the car

being driven back. Having slowly counted thirty I opened my eyes, and

looked about me. This, and not the fevered moment when first I had

looked upon the room with the golden door, seemed to be my true

awakening, for about me was comprehensible world, the homely streets

of London, with deserted Portland Place stretching away on the one

hand and a glimpse of midnight Regent Street obtainable on the other!

The clock of the neighboring church struck one.

My mind yet dull with wonder of it all, I walked on to Oxford Circus

and there obtained a taxicab, in which I drove to Fleet Street.

Discharging the man, I passed quickly under the time worn archway

into the court and approached our stair. Indeed, I was about to ascend

when some one came racing down and almost knocked me over.

"Petrie! Petrie! Thank God you're safe!"

It was Nayland Smith, his eyes blazing with excitement, as I could

see by the dim light of the lamp near the archway, and his hands, as

he clapped them upon my shoulders, quivering tensely.

"Petrie!" he ran on impulsively, and speaking with extraordinary

rapidly, "I was detained by a most ingenious trick and arrived only

five minutes ago, to find you missing, the window wide open, and signs

of hooks, evidently to support a rope ladder, having been attached

to the ledge."

"But where were you going?"

"Weymouth has just rung up. We have indisputable proof that the

mandarin Ki-Ming, whom I had believed to be dead, and whom I know for

a high official of the Si-Fan, is actually in London! It's neck or

nothing this time, Petrie! I'm going straight to Portland Place!"

"To the Chinese Legation?"

"Exactly!"

"Perhaps I can save you a journey," I said slowly. "I have just come

from there!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MANDARIN KI-MING

Nayland Smith strode up and down the little sitting-room, tugging

almost savagely at the lobe of his left ear. To-night his increasing

grayness was very perceptible, and with his feverishly bright eyes

staring straightly before him, he looked haggard and ill, despite the

deceptive tan of his skin.

"Petrie," he began in his abrupt fashion, "I am losing confidence in

myself."

"Why?" I asked in surprise.

"I hardly know; but for some occult reason I feel afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Exactly; afraid. There is some deep mystery here that I cannot fathom.

In the first place, if they had really meant you to remain ignorant of

the place at which the episodes described by you occurred, they would

scarcely have dropped you at the end of Portland Place."

"You mean ...?"

"I mean that I don't believe you were taken to the Chinese Legation at

all. Undoubtedly you saw the mandarin Ki-Ming; I recognize him from

your description."

"You have met him, then?"

"No; but I know those who have. He is undoubtedly a very dangerous man,

and it is just possible----"

He hesitated, glancing at me strangely.

"It is just possible," he continued musingly, "that his presence

marks the beginning of the end. Fu-Manchu's health may be permanently

impaired, and Ki-Ming may have superceded him."

"But, if what you suspect, Smith, be only partly true, with what

object was I seized and carried to that singular interview? What was

the meaning of the whole solemn farce?"

"Its meaning remains to be discovered," he answered; "but that the

mandarin is amicably disposed I refuse to believe. You may dismiss the

idea. In dealing with Ki-Ming we are to all intents and purposes

dealing with Fu-Manchu. To me, this man's presence means one thing: we

are about to be subjected to attempts along slightly different lines."

I was completely puzzled by Smith's tone.

"You evidently know more of this man, Ki-Ming, than you have yet

explained to me," I said.

Nayland Smith pulled out the blackened briar and began rapidly to

load it.

"He is a graduate," he replied, "of the Lama College, or monastery, of

Rache-Churân.

"This does not enlighten me."

Having got his pipe going well--

"What do you know of animal magnetism?" snapped Smith.

The question seemed so wildly irrelevant that I stared at him in

silence for some moments. Then--

"Certain powers sometimes grouped under that head are recognized in

every hospital to-day," I answered shortly.

"Quite so. And the monastery of Rache-Churân is entirely devoted to

the study of the subject."

"Do you mean that that gentle old man----"

"Petrie, a certain M. Sokoloff, a Russian gentleman whose acquaintance

I made in Mandalay, related to me an episode that took place at the

house of the mandarin Ki-Ming in Canton. It actually occurrd in the

presence of M. Sokoloff, and therefore is worthy of your close attention.

"He had had certain transactions with Ki-Ming, and at their conclusion

received an invitation to dine with the mandarin. The entertainment

took place in a sort of loggia or open pavilion, immediately in front

of which was an ornamental lake, with numerous waterlilies growing

upon its surface. One of the servants, I think his name was Li,

dropped a silver bowl containing orange-flower water for pouring upon

the hands, and some of the contents lightly sprinkled M. Sokoloff's

garments.

"Ki-Ming spoke no word of rebuke, Petrie; he merely \_looked\_ at Li,

with those deceptive, gazelle-like eyes. Li, according to my

acquaintance account, began to make palpable and increasingly anxious

attempts to look anywhere rather than into the mild eyes of his

implacable master. M. Sokoloff, who, up to that moment, had

entertained similar views to your own respecting his host, regarded

this unmoving stare of Ki-Ming's as a sort of kindly, because silent,

reprimand. The behavior of the unhappy Li very speedily served to

disabuse his mind of that delusion.

"Petrie--the man grew livid, his whole body began to twitch and shake

as though an ague had attacked him; and his eyes protruded hideously

from their sockets! M. Sokoloff assured me that he \_felt\_ himself

turning pale--when Ki-Ming, very slowly, raised his right hand and

pointed to the pond.

"Li began to pant as though engaged in a life and death struggle with

a physically superior antagonist. He clutched at the posts of the

loggia with frenzied hands and a bloody froth came to his lips. He

began to move backward, step by step, step by step, all the time

striving, with might and main, to \_prevent\_ himself from doing so!

His eyes were set rigidly upon Ki-Ming, like the eyes of a rabbit

fascinated by a python. Ki-Ming continued to point.

"Right to the brink of the lake the man retreated, and there, for one

dreadful moment, he paused and uttered a sort of groaning sob. Then,

clenching his fists frenziedly, he stepped back into the water and

immediately sank among the lilies. Ki-Ming continued to gaze fixedly--

at the spot where bubbles were rising; and presently up came the livid

face of the drowning man, still having those glazed eyes turned,

immovably, upon the mandarin. For nearly five seconds that hideous,

distorted face gazed from amid the mass of blooms, then it sank

again ... and rose no more."

"What!" I cried, "do you mean to tell me----"

"Ki-Ming struck a gong. Another servant appeared with a fresh bowl of

water; and the mandarin calmly resumed his dinner!"

I drew a deep breath and raised my hand to my head.

"It is almost unbelievable," I said. "But what completely passes my

comprehension is his allowing me to depart unscathed, having once held

me in his power. Why the long harangue and the pose of friendship?

"That point is not so difficult."

"What!"

"That does not surprise me in the least. You may recollect that Dr.

Fu-Manchu entertains for you an undoubted affection, distinctly Chinese

in its character, but nevertheless an affection! There is no intention

of assassinating \_you\_, Petrie; \_I\_ am the selected victim."

I started up.

"Smith! what do you mean? What danger, other than that which has

threatened us for over two years, threatens us to-night?"

"Now you come to the point which \_does\_ puzzle me. I believe I stated

awhile ago that I was afraid. You have placed your finger upon the

cause of my fear. \_What\_ threatens us to-night?"

He spoke the words in such a fashion that they seemed physically to

chill me. The shadows of the room grew menacing; the very silence

became horrible. I longed with a terrible longing for company, for the

strength that is in numbers; I would have had the place full to

overflowing--for it seemed that we two, condemned by the mysterious

organization called the Si-Fan, were at that moment surrounded by the

entire arsenal of horrors at the command of Dr. Fu-Manchu. I broke

that morbid silence. My voice had assumed an unnatural tone.

"Why do you dread this man, Ki-Ming, so much?"

"Because he must be aware that I know he is in London."

"Well?"

"Dr. Fu-Manchu has no official status. Long ago, his Legation denied

all knowledge of his existence. But the mandarin Ki-Ming is known to

every diplomat in Europe, Asia and American almost. Only \_I\_, and now

yourself, know that he is a high official of the Si-Fan; Ki-Ming is

aware that I know. Why, therefore, does he risk his neck in London?"

"He relies upon his national cunning."

"Petrie, he is aware that I hold evidence to hang him, either here or

in China! He relies upon one thing; upon striking first and striking

surely. Why is he so confident? I do not know. Therefore I am afraid."

Again a cold shudder ran icily through me. A piece of coal dropped

lower into the dying fire--and my heart leapt wildly. Then, in a flash,

I remembered something.

"Smith!" I cried, "the letter! We have not looked at the letter."

Nayland Smith laid his pipe upon the mantelpiece and smiled grimly.

From his pocket he took out square piece of paper, and thrust it close

under my eyes.

"I remembered it as I passed your borrowed garment--which bear no

maker's name--on my way to the bedroom for matches," he said.

The paper was covered with Chinese characters!

"What does it mean?" I demanded breathlessly.

Smith uttered a short, mirthless laugh.

"It states that an attempt of a particularly dangerous nature is to be

made upon my life to-night, and it recommends me to guard the door,

and advises that you watch the window overlooking the court, and keep

your pistol ready for instant employment." He stared at me oddly. "How

should you act in the circumstances, Petrie?"

"I should strongly distrust such advice. Yet--what else can we \_do?\_"

"There are several alternatives, but I prefer to follow the advice of

Ki-Ming."

The clock of St. Paul's chimed the half-hour: half-past two.

CHAPTER XXIX

LAMA SORCERY

From my post in the chair by the window I could see two sides of the

court below; that immediately opposite, with the entrance to some

chambers situated there, and that on the right, with the cloisteresque

arches beyond which lay a maze of old-world passages and stairs

whereby one who knew the tortuous navigation might come ultimately

to the Embankment.

It was this side of the court which lay in deepest shadow. By altering

my position quite slightly I could command a view of the arched

entrance on the left with its pale lamp in an iron bracket above, and

of the high blank wall whose otherwise unbroken expanse it interrupted.

All was very still; only on occasions the passing of a vehicle along

Fleet Street would break the silence.

The nature of the danger that threatened I was wholly unable to

surmise. Since, my pistol on the table beside me, I sat on guard at

the window, and Smith, also armed, watched the outer door, it was not

apparent by what agency the shadowy enemy could hope to come at us.

Something strange I had detected in Nayland Smith's manner, however,

which had induced me to believe that he suspected, if he did not know,

what form of menace hung over us in the darkness. One thing in

particular was puzzling me extremely: if Smith doubted the good faith

of the sender of the message, why had he acted upon it?

Thus my mind worked--in endless and profitless cycles--whilst my eyes

were ever searching the shadows below me.

And, as I watched, wondering vaguely why Smith at his post was so

silent, presently I became aware of the presence of a slim figure

over by the arches on the right. This discovery did not come suddenly,

nor did it surprise me; I merely observed without being conscious of

any great interest in the matter, that some one was standing in the

court below, looking up at me where I sat.

I cannot hope to explain my state of mind at that moment, to render

understandable by contrast with the cold fear which had visited me so

recently, the utter apathy of my mental attitude. To this day I cannot

recapture the mood--and for a very good reason, though one that was

not apparent to me at the time.

It was the Eurasian girl Zarmi, who was standing there, looking up at

the window! Silently I watched her. Why was I silent?--why did I not

warn Smith of the presence of one of Dr. Fu-Manchu's servants? I

cannot explain, although later, the strangeness of my behavior may

become in some measure understandable.

Zarmi raised her hand, beckoning to me, then stepped back, revealing

the presence of a companion, hitherto masked by the dense shadows that

lay under the arches. This second watcher moved slowly forward, and I

perceived him to be none other than the mandarin Ki-Ming.

This I noted with interest, but with a sort of \_impersonal\_ interest,

as I might have watched the entrance of a character upon the stage of

a theater. Despite the feeble light, I could see his benign

countenance very clearly; but, far from being excited, a dreamy

contentment possessed me; I actually found myself hoping that Smith

would not intrude upon my reverie!

What a fascinating pageant it had been--the Fu-Manchu drama--from the

moment that I had first set eyes upon the Yellow doctor. Again I seemed

to be enacting my part in that scene, two years ago and more, when I

had burst into the bare room above Shen-Yan's opium den and had stood

face to face with Dr. Fu-Manchu. He wore a plain yellow robe, its hue

almost identical with that of his gaunt, hairless face; his elbows

rested upon the dirty table and his pointed chin upon his long,

bony hands.

Into those uncanny eyes I stared, those eyes, long, narrow, and

slightly oblique, their brilliant, catlike greenness sometimes horribly

filmed, like the eyes of some grotesque bird....

Thus it began; and from this point I was carried on, step by step

through every episode, great and small. It was such a retrospect as

passes through the mind of one drowning.

With a vividness that was terrible yet exquisite, I saw Kâramaneh, my

lost love; I saw her first wrapped in a hooded opera-cloak, with her

flower-like face and glorious dark eyes raised to me; I saw her in the

gauzy Eastern raiment of a slave-girl, and I saw her in the dress of

a gipsy.

Through moments sweet and bitter I lived again, through hours of

suspense and days of ceaseless watching; through the long months of

that first summer when my unhappy love came to me, and on, on,

interminably on. For years I lived again beneath that ghastly Yellow

cloud. I searched throughout the land of Egypt for Kâramaneh and knew

once more the sorrow of losing her. Time ceased to exist for me.

Then, at the end of these strenuous years, I came at last to my

meeting with Ki-Ming in the room with the golden door. At this point

my visionary adventures took a new turn. I sat again upon the

red-covered couch and listened, half stupefied, to the placid speech

of the mandarin. Again I came under the spell of his singular

personality, and again, closing my eyes, I consented to be led from

the room.

But, having crossed the threshold, a sudden awful doubt passed through

my mind, arrow-like. The hand that held my arm was bony and clawish;

I could detect the presence of incredibly long finger nails--nails

long as those of some buried vampire of the black ages!

Choking down a cry of horror, I opened my eyes--heedless of the

promise given but a few moments earlier--and looked into the face of

my guide.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu!...

Never, dreaming or waking, have I known a sensation identical with

that which now clutched my heart; I thought that it must be death.

For ages, untold ages--aeons longer than the world has known--I looked

into that still, awful face, into those unnatural green eyes. I jerked

my hand free from the Chinaman's clutch and sprang back.

As I did so, I became miraculously translated from the threshold of

the room with the golden door to our chambers in the court adjoining

Fleet Street; I came into full possession of my faculties (or believed

so at the time); I realized that I had nodded at my post, that I had

dreamed a strange dream ... but I realized something else. A ghoulish

presence was in the room.

Snatching up my pistol from the table I turned. Like some evil jinn of

Arabian lore, Dr. Fu-Manchu, surrounded by a slight mist, stood

looking at me!

Instantly I raised the pistol, leveled it steadily at the high,

dome-like brow--and fired! There could be no possibility of missing at

such short range, no possibility whatever ... and in the very instant

of pulling the trigger the mist cleared, the lineaments of Dr.

Fu-Manchu melted magically. This was not the Chinese doctor who stood

before me, at whose skull I still was pointing the deadly little

weapon, into whose brain I had fired the bullet; \_it was Nayland

Smith!\_

Ki-Ming, by means of the unholy arts of the Lamas of Rache-Churân,

had caused my to murder my best friend!

"Smith!" I whispered huskily--"God forgive me, what have I done? What

have I done?"

I stepped forward to support him ere he fell; but utter oblivion

closed down upon me, and I knew no more.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"He will do quite well now." said a voice that seemed to come from a

vast distance. "The effects of the drug will have entirely worn off

when he wakes, except that there may be nausea, and possibly muscular

pain for a time."

I opened my eyes; they were throbbing agonizingly. I lay in bed, and

beside me stood Murdoch McCabe, the famous toxicological expert from

Charing Cross Hospital--and Nayland Smith!

"Ah, that's better!" cried McCabe cheerily. "Here--drink this."

I drank from the glass which he raised to my lips. I was too weak for

speech, too weak for wonder. Nayland Smith, his face gray and drawn in

the cold light of early morning, watched me anxiously. McCabe in a

matter of fact way that acted upon me like a welcome tonic, put several

purely medical questions, which at first by dint of a great effort,

but, with ever-increasing ease, I answered.

"Yes," he said musingly at last. "Of course it is all but impossible

to speak with certainty, but I am disposed to think that you have been

drugged with some preparation of hashish. The most likely is that

known in Eastern countries as \_maagûn\_ or \_barsh\_, composed of equal

parts of \_cannabis indica\_ and opium, with hellebore and two other

constituents, which vary according to the purpose which the \_maagûn\_

is intended to serve. This renders the subject particularly open to

subjective hallucination, and a pliable instrument in the hands of a

hypnotic operator, for instance."

"You see, old man?" cried Smith eagerly. "You see?"

But I shook my head weakly.

"I shot you," I said. "It is impossible that I could have missed."

"Mr. Smith has placed me in possession of the facts," interrupted

McCabe, "and I can outline with reasonable certainty what took place.

Of course, it's all very amazing, utterly fantastic in fact, but I

have met with almost parallel cases in Egypt, in India, and elsewhere

in the East: never in London, I'll confess. You see, Dr. Petrie, you

were taken into the presence of a very accomplished hypnotist, having

been previously prepared by a stiff administration of \_maagûn\_.

You are doubtless familiar with the remarkable experiments in

psycho-therapeutics conducted at the Salpêtrier in Paris, and you

will readily understand me when I say that, prior to your recovering

consciousness in the presence of the mandarin Ki-Ming, you had

received your hypnotic instructions.

"These were to be put into execution either at a certain time (duly

impressed upon your drugged mind) or at a given signal...."

"It was a signal," snapped Smith. "Ki-Ming stood in the court below

and looked up at the window," I objected.

"In that event," snapped Smith, "he would have spoken softly, through

the letter-box of the door!"

"You immediately resumed your interrupted trance," continued McCabe,

"and by hypnotic suggestion impressed upon you earlier in the evening,

you were ingeniously led up to a point at which, under what delusion

I know not, you fired at Mr. Smith. I had the privilege of studying an

almost parallel case in Simla, where an officer was fatally stabbed by

his \_khitmatgar\_ (a most faithful servant) acting under the hypnotic

prompting of a certain \_fakîr\_ whom the officer had been unwise

enough to chastise. The \_fakîr\_ paid for the crime with his life, I

may add. The \_khitmatgar\_ shot him, ten minutes later."

"I had no chance at Ki-Ming," snapped Smith. "He vanished like a

shadow. But has has played his big card and lost! Henceforth he is a

hunted man; and he knows it! Oh!" he cried, seeing me watching him in

bewilderment, "I suspected some Lama trickery, old man, and I stuck

closely to the arrangements proposed by the mandarin, but kept you

under careful observation!"

"But, Smith--I shot you! It was impossible to miss!"

"I agree. But do you recall the \_report?\_"

"The report? I was too dazed, too horrified, by the discovery of what

I had done...."

"There was no report, Petrie. I am not entirely a stranger to

Indo-Chinese jugglery, and you had a very strange look in your eyes.

Therefore I took the precaution of unloading your Browning!"

CHAPTER XXX

MEDUSA

Legal business, connected with the estate of a distant relative,

deceased, necessitated my sudden departure from London, within

twenty-four hours of the events just narrated; and at a time when

London was for me the center of the universe. The business being

terminated--and in a manner financially satisfactory to myself--I

discovered that with luck I could just catch the fast train back.

Amid a perfect whirl of hotel porters and taxi-drivers worthy of

Nayland Smith I departed for the station ... to arrive at the

entrance to the platform at the exact moment that the guard raised

his green flag!

"Too late, sir! Stand back, if you please!"

The ticket-collector at the barrier thrust out his arm to stay me. The

London express was moving from the platform. But my determination to

travel by that train and by no other over-rode all obstacles; If I

missed it, I should be forced to wait until the following morning.

I leapt past the barrier, completely taking the man by surprise, and

went racing up the platform. Many arms were outstretched to detain me,

and the gray-bearded guard stood fully in my path; but I dodged them

all, collided with and upset a gigantic negro who wore a chauffeur's

uniform--and found myself level with a first-class compartment; the

window was open.

Amid a chorus of excited voices, I tossed my bag in at the window,

leapt upon the footboard and turned the handle. Although the entrance

to the tunnel was perilously near now, I managed to wrench the door

open and to swing myself into the carriage. Then, by means of the

strap, I reclosed the door in the nick of time, and sank, panting,

upon the seat. I had a vague impression that the black chauffeur,

having recovered himself, had raced after me to the uttermost point

of the platform, but, my end achieved, I was callously indifferent to

the outrageous means thereto which I seen fit to employ. The express

dashed into the tunnel. I uttered a great sigh of relief.

With Kâramaneh in the hands of the Si-Fan, this journey to the north

had indeed been undertaken with the utmost reluctance. Nayland Smith

had written to me once during my brief absence, and his letter had

inspired a yet keener desire to be back and at grips with the Yellow

group; for he had hinted broadly that a tangible clue to the

whereabouts of the Si-Fan head-quarters had at last been secured.

Now I learnt that I had a traveling companion--a woman. She was seated

in the further, opposite corner, wore a long, loose motor-coat, which

could not altogether conceal the fine lines of her lithe figure, and a

thick veil hid her face. A motive for the excited behavior of the

negro chauffeur suggested itself to my mind; a label; "Engaged," was

pasted to the window!

I glanced across the compartment. Through the closely woven veil the

woman was watching me. An apology clearly was called for.

"Madame," I said, "I hope you will forgive this unfortunate intrusion;

but it was vitally important that I should not miss the London train."

She bowed, very slightly, very coldly--and turned her head aside.

The rebuff was as unmistakable as my offense was irremediable. Nor did

I feel justified in resenting it. Therefore, endeavoring to dismiss

the matter from my mind, I placed my bag upon the rack, and unfolding

the newspaper with which I was provided, tried to interest myself in

the doings of the world at large.

My attempt proved not altogether successful; strive how I would, my

thoughts persistently reverted to the Si-Fan, the evil, secret society

who held in their power one dearer to me than all the rest of the

world; to Dr. Fu-Manchu, the genius who darkly controlled my destiny;

and to Nayland Smith, the barrier between the White races and the

devouring tide of the Yellow.

Sighing again, involuntarily, I glanced up ... to meet the gaze of a

pair of wonderful eyes.

Never, in my experience, had I seen their like. The dark eyes of

Kâramaneh were wonderful and beautiful, the eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu

sinister and wholly unforgettable; but the eyes of this woman were

incredible. Their glance was all but insupportable; the were the eyes

of a Medusa!

Since I had met; in the not distant past, the soft gaze of Ki-Ming,

the mandarin whose phenomenal hypnotic powers rendered him capable of

transcending the achievements of the celebrated Cagliostro, I knew

much of the power of the human eye. But these were unlike any human

eyes I had ever known.

Long, almond-shaped, bordered by heavy jet-black lashes, arched over

by finely penciled brows, their strange brilliancy, as of a fire

within, was utterly uncanny. They were the eyes of some beautiful

wild creature rather than those of a woman.

Their possessor had now thrown back her motor-veil, revealing a face

Orientally dark and perfectly oval, with a clustering mass of dull

gold hair, small, aquiline nose and full, red lips. Her weird eyes met

mine for an instant, and then the long lashes drooped quickly, as she

leant back against the cushions, with a graceful languor suggestive of

the East rather than of the West.

Her long coat had fallen partly open, and I saw, with surprise, that

it was lined with leopard-skin. One hand was ungloved, and lay on the

arm-rest--a slim hand of the hue of old ivory, with a strange, ancient

ring upon the index finger.

This woman obviously was not a European, and I experienced great

difficulty in determining with what Asiatic nation she could claim

kinship. In point of fact I had never seen another who remotely

resembled her; she was a fit employer for the gigantic negro with whom

I had collided on the platform.

I tried to laugh at myself, staring from the window at the moon-bathed

landscape; but the strange personality of my solitary companion would

not be denied, and I looked quickly in her direction--in time to

detect her glancing away; in time to experience the uncanny

fascination of her gaze.

The long slim hand attracted my attention again, the green stone in the

ring affording a startling contrast against the dull cream of the skin.

Whether the woman's personality, or a vague perfume of which I became

aware, were responsible, I found myself thinking of a flower-bedecked

shrine, wherefrom arose the smoke of incense to some pagan god.

In vain I told myself that my frame of mind was contemptible, that I

should be ashamed of such weakness. Station after station was left

behind, as the express sped through moonlit England towards the smoky

metropolis. Assured that I was being furtively watched, I became more

and more uneasy.

It was with a distinct sense of effort that I withheld my gaze,

forcing myself to look out of the window. When, having reasoned

against the mad ideas that sought to obsess me, I glanced again across

the compartment, I perceived, with inexpressible relief, that my

companion had lowered her veil.

She kept it lowered throughout the remainder of the journey; yet

during the hour that ensued I continued to experience sensations of

which I have never since been able to think without a thrill of fear.

It seemed that I had thrust myself, not into a commonplace railway

compartment, but into a Cumaean cavern.

If only I could have addressed this utterly mysterious stranger, have

uttered some word of commonplace, I felt that the spell might have

been broken. But, for some occult reason, in no way associated with

my first rebuff, I found myself tongue-tied; I sustained, for an hour

(the longest I had ever known), a silent watch and ward over my reason;

I seemed to be repelling, fighting against, some subtle power that

sought to flood my brain, swamp my individuality, and enslave me to

another's will.

In what degree this was actual, and in what due to a mind overwrought

from endless conflict with the Yellow group, I know not to this day,

but you who read these records of our giant struggle with Fu-Manchu

and his satellites shall presently judge for yourselves.

When, at last, the brakes were applied, and the pillars and platforms

of the great terminus glided into view, how welcome was the smoky

glare, how welcome the muffled roar of busy London!

A huge negro--the double of the man I had overthrown--opened the door

of the compartment, bestowing upon me a glance in which enmity and

amazement were oddly blended, and the woman, drawing the cloak about

her graceful figure, stood up composedly.

She reached for a small leather case on the rack, and her loose sleeve

fell back, to reveal a bare arm--soft, perfectly molded, of the even

hue of old ivory. Just below the elbow a strange-looking snake bangle

clasped the warm-flesh; the eyes; dull green, seemed to hold a

slumbering fire--a spark--a spark of living light.

Then--she was gone!

"Thank Heaven!" I muttered, and felt like another Dante emerging from

the Hades.

As I passed out of the station, I had a fleeting glimpse of a gray

figure stepping into a big car, driven by a black chauffeur.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE MARMOSET

Half-past twelve was striking as I came out of the terminus, buttoning

up my overcoat, and pulling my soft hat firmly down upon my head,

started to walk to Hyde Park Corner.

I had declined the services of the several taxi-drivers who had

accosted me and had determined to walk a part of the distance homeward,

in order to check the fever of excitement which consumed me.

Already I was ashamed of the strange fears which had been mine during

the journey, but I wanted to reflect, to conquer my mood, and the

midnight solitude of the land of Squares which lay between me and Hyde

Park appealed quite irresistibly.

There is a distinct pleasure to be derived from a solitary walk through

London, in the small hours of an April morning, provided one is so

situated as to be capable of enjoying it. To appreciate the solitude

and mystery of the sleeping city, a certain sense of prosperity--a

knowledge that one is immune from the necessity of being abroad at

that hour--is requisite. The tramp, the night policeman and the

coffee-stall keeper know more of London by night than most people--but

of the romance of the dark hours they know little. Romance succumbs

before necessity.

I had good reason to be keenly alive to the aroma of mystery which

pervades the most commonplace thoroughfare after the hum of the

traffic has subsided--when the rare pedestrian and the rarer cab alone

traverse the deserted highway. With more intimate cares seeking to

claim my mind, it was good to tramp along the echoing, empty streets

and to indulge in imaginative speculation regarding the strange

things that night must shroud in every big city. I have known the

solitude of deserts, but the solitude of London is equally fascinating.

He whose business or pleasure had led him to traverse the route which

was mine on this memorable night must have observed how each of the

squares composing that residential chain which links the outer with

the inner Society has a popular and an exclusive side. The angle used

by vehicular traffic in crossing the square from corner to corner

invariably is rich in a crop of black board bearing house-agent's

announcements.

In the shadow of such a board I paused, taking out my case an

leisurely selecting a cigar. So many of the houses in the southwest

angle were unoccupied, that I found myself taking quite an interest

in one a little way ahead; from the hall door and from the long

conservatory over the porch light streamed out.

Excepting these illuminations, there was no light elsewhere in the

square to show which houses were inhabited and which vacant. I might

have stood in a street of Pompeii or Thebes--a street of the dead past.

I permitted my imagination to dwell upon this idea as I fumbled for

matches and gazed about me. I wondered if a day would come when some

savant of a future land, in a future age, should stand where I stood

and endeavor to reconstruct, from the crumbling ruins, this typical

London square. A slight breeze set the hatchet-board creaking above

my head, as I held my gloved hands about the pine-vesta.

At that moment some one or something whistled close beside me!

I turned, in a flash, dropping the match upon the pavement. There was

no lamp near the spot whereat I stood, and the gateway and porch of

the deserted residence seemed to be empty. I stood there peering in

the direction from which the mysterious whistle had come.

The drone of a taxicab, approaching from the north, increased in

volume, as the vehicle came spinning around the angle of the square,

passed me, and went droning on its way. I watched it swing around

the distant corner ... and, in the new stillness, the whistle was

repeated!

This time the sound chilled me. The whistle was pitched in a curious,

inhuman key, and it possessed a mocking note that was strangely uncanny.

Listening intently and peering towards the porch of the empty house,

I struck a second match, pushed the iron gate open and made for the

steps, sheltering the feeble flame with upraised hand. As I did so,

the whistle was again repeated, but from some spot further away, to

the left of the porch, and from low down upon the ground.

Just as I glimpsed something moving under the lee of the porch,

the match was blown out, for I was hampered by the handbag which I

carried. Thus reminded of its presence, however, I recollected that

my pocket-lamp was in it. Quickly opening the bag, I took out the

lamp, and, passing around the corner of the steps, directed a ray of

light into the narrow passage which communicated with the rear of

the building.

Half-way along the passage, looking back at me over its shoulder, and

whistling angrily, was a little marmoset!

I pulled up as sharply as though the point of a sword had been held at

my throat. One marmoset is sufficiently like another to deceive the

ordinary observer, but unless I was permitting a not unnatural

prejudice to influence my opinion, this particular specimen was the

pet of Dr. Fu-Manchu!

Excitement, not untinged with fear, began to grow up within me. Hyde

Park was no far cry, this was near to the heart of social London; yet,

somewhere close at hand, it might be, watching me as I stood--lurked,

perhaps, the great and evil being who dreamed of overthrowing the

entire white race!

With a grotesque grimace and a final, chattering whistle, the little

creature leapt away out of the beam of light cast by my lamp. Its

sudden disappearance brought me to my senses and reminded me of my

plain duty. I set off along the passage briskly, arrived at a small,

square yard ... and was just in time to see the ape leap into a

well-like opening before a basement window. I stepped to the brink,

directing the light down into the well.

I saw a collection of rotten leaves, waste paper, and miscellaneous

rubbish--but the marmoset was not visible. Then I perceived that

practically all the glass in the window had been broken. A sound of

shrill chattering reached me from the blackness of the underground

apartment.

Again I hesitated. What did the darkness mask?

The note of a distant motor-horn rose clearly above the vague throbbing

which is the only silence known to the town-dweller.

Gripping the unlighted cigar between my teeth, I placed my bag upon

the ground and dropped into the well before the broken window. To raise

the sash was a simple matter, and, having accomplished it, I inspected

the room within.

The light showed a large kitchen, with torn wall-paper and decorator's

litter strewn about the floor, a whitewash pail in one corner, and

nothing else.

I climbed in, and, taking from my pocket the Browning pistol without

which I had never traveled since the return of the dreadful Chinaman

to England, I crossed to the door, which was ajar, and looked out into

the passage beyond.

Stifling an exclamation, I fell back a step. Two gleaming eyes stared

straightly into mine!

The next moment I had forced a laugh to my lips ... as the marmoset

turned and went gamboling up the stairs. The house was profoundly

silent. I crossed the passage and followed the creature, which now was

proceeding, I thought, with more of a set purpose.

Out into a spacious and deserted hallway it led me, where my cautious

footsteps echoed eerily, and ghostly faces seemed to peer down upon me

from the galleries above. I should have liked to have unbarred the

street door, in order to have opened a safe line of retreat in the

event of its being required, but the marmoset suddenly sprang up the

main stairway at a great speed, and went racing around the gallery

overhead toward the front of the house.

Determined, if possible, to keep the creature in view, I started in

pursuit. Up the uncarpeted stairs I went, and, from the rail of the

landing, looked down into the blackness of the hallway apprehensively.

Nothing stirred below. The marmoset had disappeared between the

half-opened leaves of a large folding door. Casting the beam of light

ahead of me I followed. I found myself in a long, lofty apartment,

evidently a drawing-room.

Of the quarry I could detect no sign; but the only other door of the

room was closed; therefore, since the creature had entered, it must,

I argued, undoubtedly be concealed somewhere in the apartment.

Flashing the light about to right and left, I presently perceived that

a conservatory (no doubt facing on the square) ran parallel with one

side of the room. French windows gave access to either end of it; and

it was through one of these, which was slightly open, that the

questioning ray had intruded.

I stepped into the conservatory. Linen blinds covered the windows, but

a faint light from outside found access to the bare, tiled apartment.

Ten paces on my right, from an aperture once closed by a square wooden

panel that now lay upon the floor, the marmoset was grimacing at me.

Realizing that the ray of my lamp must be visible through the blinds

from outside, I extinguished it ... and, a moving silhouette against a

faintly luminous square, I could clearly distinguish the marmoset

watching me.

There was a light in the room beyond!

The marmoset disappeared--and I became aware of a faint, incense-like

perfume. Where had I met with it before? Nothing disturbed the silence

of the empty house wherein I stood; yet I hesitated for several seconds

to pursue the chase further. The realization came to me that the hole

in the wall communicated with the conservatory of the corner house in

the square, the house with the lighted windows.

Determined to see the thing through, I discarded my overcoat--and

crawled through the gap. The smell of burning perfume became almost

overpowering, as I stood upright, to find myself almost touching

curtains of some semi-transparent golden fabric draped in the door

between the conservatory and the drawing-room.

Cautiously, inch by inch, I approached my eyes to the slight gap in

the draperies, as, from somewhere in the house below, sounded the

clangor of a brazen gong. Seven times its ominous note boomed out. I

shrank back into my sanctuary; the incense seemed to be stifling me.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHRINE OF SEVEN LAMPS

Never can I forget that nightmare apartment, that efreet's hall. It

was identical in shape with the room of the adjoining house through

which I had come, but its walls were draped in somber black and a

dead black carpet covered the entire floor. A golden curtain--similar

to that which concealed me--broke the somber expanse of the end wall

to my right, and the door directly opposite my hiding-place was closed.

Across the gold curtain, wrought in glittering black, were seven

characters, apparently Chinese; before it, supported upon seven ebony

pedestals, burned seven golden lamps; whilst, dotted about the black

carpet, were seven gold-lacquered stools, each having a black cushion

set before it. There was no sign of the marmoset; the incredible room

of black and gold was quite empty, with a sort of stark emptiness that

seemed to oppress my soul.

Close upon the booming of the gong followed a sound of many footsteps

and a buzz of subdued conversation. Keeping well back in the welcome

shadow I watched, with bated breath, the opening of the door

immediately opposite.

The outer sides of its leaves proved to be of gold, and one glimpse of

the room beyond awoke a latent memory and gave it positive form. I had

been in this house before; it was in that room with the golden door

that I had had my memorable interview with the mandarin Ki-Ming! My

excitement grew more and more intense.

Singly, and in small groups, a number of Orientals came in. All wore

European, or semi-European garments, but I was enabled to identify two

for Chinamen, two for Hindus and three for Burmans. Other Asiatics

there were, also, whose exact place among the Eastern races I could

not determine; there was at least one Egyptian and there were several

Eurasians; no women were present.

Standing grouped just within the open door, the gathering of Orientals

kept up a ceaseless buzz of subdued conversation; then, abruptly,

stark silence fell, and through a lane of bowed heads, Ki-Ming, the

famous Chinese diplomat, entered, smiling blandly, and took his seat

upon one of the seven golden stools. He wore the picturesque yellow

robe, trimmed with marten fur, which I had seen once before, and he

placed his pearl-encircled cap, surmounted by the coral ball denoting

his rank, upon the black cushion beside him.

Almost immediately afterward entered a second and even more striking

figure. It was that of a Lama monk! He was received with the same

marks of deference which had been accorded the mandarin; and he

seated himself upon another of the golden stools.

Silence, a moment of hushed expectancy, and ... yellow-robed, immobile,

his wonderful, evil face emaciated by illness, but his long, magnetic

eyes blazing greenly, as though not a soul but an elemental spirit

dwelt within that gaunt, high-shouldered body, Dr. Fu-Manchu entered,

slowly, leaning upon a heavy stick!

The realities seemed to be slipping from me; I could not believe that

I looked upon a material world. This had been a night of wonders,

having no place in the life of a sane, modern man, but belonging to

the days of the jinn and the Arabian necromancers.

Fu-Manchu was greeted by a universal raising of hands, but in complete

silence. He also wore a cap surmounted by a coral ball, and this he

placed upon one of the black cushions set before a golden stool. Then,

resting heavily upon his stick, he began to speak--in French!

As on listens to a dream-voice, I listened to that, alternately

gutteral and sibilant, of the terrible Chinese doctor. He was

defending himself! With what he was charged by his sinister brethren

I knew not nor could I gather from his words, but that he was

rendering account of his stewardship became unmistakable. Scarce

crediting my senses, I heard him unfold to his listeners details of

crimes successfully perpetrated, and with the results of some of these

I was but too familiar; other there were in the ghastly catalogue

which had been accomplished secretly. Then my blood froze with horror.

My own name was mentioned--and that of Nayland Smith! We two stood in

the way of the coming of one whom he called the Lady of the Si-Fan,

in the way of Asiatic supremacy.

A fantastic legend once mentioned to me by Smith, of some woman

cherished in a secret fastness of Hindustan who was destined one day

to rule the world, now appeared, to my benumbed senses, to be the

unquestioned creed of the murderous, cosmopolitan group known as the

Si-Fan! At every mention of her name all heads were bowed in reverence.

Dr. Fu-Manchu spoke without the slightest trace of excitement; he

assured his auditors of his fidelity to their cause and proposed to

prove to them that he enjoyed the complete confidence of the Lady of

the Si-Fan.

And with every moment that passed the giant intellect of the speaker

became more and more apparent. Years ago Nayland Smith had asssure me

that Dr. Fu-Manchu was a linguist who spoke with almost equal facility

in any of th civilized languages and in most of the barbaric; now the

truth of this was demonstrated. For, following some passage which

might be susceptible of misconstruction, Fu-Manchu would turn slightly,

and elucidate his remarks, addressing a Chinaman in Chinese, a Hindu

in Hindustanee, or an Egyptian in Arabic.

His auditors were swayed by the magnetic personality of the speaker,

as reeds by a breeze; and now I became aware of a curious

circumstance. Either because they and I viewed the character of this

great and evil man from a widely dissimilar aspect, or because, my

presence being unknown to him, I remained outside the radius of his

power, it seemed to me that these members of the evidently vast

organization known as the Si-Fan were dupes, to a man, of the Chinese

orator! It seemed to me that he used them as an instrument, playing

upon their obvious fanaticism, string by string, as a player upon an

Eastern harp, and all the time weaving harmonies to suit some giant,

incredible scheme of his own--a scheme over and beyond any of which

they had dreamed, in the fruition whereof they had no part--of the

true nature and composition of which they had no comprehension.

"Not since the day of the first Yuan Emperor," said Fu-Manchu

sibilantly, "has Our Lady of the Si-Fan--to look upon upon whom,

unveiled, is death--crossed the sacred borders. To-day I am a man

supremely happy and honored above my deserts. You shall all partake

with me of that happiness, that honor...."

Again the gong sounded seven times, and a sort of magnetic thrill

seemed to pass throughout the room. There followed a faint, musical

sound, like the tinkle of a silver bell.

All heads were lowered, but all eyes upturned to the golden curtain.

Literally holding my breath, in those moments of intense expectancy,

I watched the draperies parted from the center and pulled aside by

unseen agency.

A black covered dais was revealed, bearing an ebony chair. And seated

in the chair, enveloped from head to feet in a shimmering white veil,

was a woman. A sound like a great sigh arose from the gathering. The

woman rose slowly to her feet, and raised her arms, which were

exquisitely formed, and of the uniform hue of old ivory, so that the

veil fell back to her shoulders, revealing the green snake bangle

which she wore. She extended her long, slim hands as if in benediction;

the silver bell sounded ... and the curtain dropped again, entirely

obscuring the dais!

Frankly, I thought myself mad; for this "lady of the Si-Fan" was none

other than my mysterious traveling companion! This was some solemn farce

with which Fu-Manchu sought to impress his fanatical dupes. And he had

succeeded; they were inspired, their eyes blazed. Here were men capable

of any crime in the name of the Si-Fan!

Every face within my ken I had studied individually, and now slowly

and cautiously I changed my position, so that a group of three members

standing immediately to the right of the door came into view. One of

them--a tall, spare, and closely bearded man whom I took for some kind

of Hindu--had removed his gaze from the dais and was glancing

furtively all about him. Once he looked in my direction, and my heart

leapt high, then seemed to stop its pulsing.

An overpowering consciousness of my danger came to me; a dim

envisioning of what appalling fate would be mine in the event of

discovery. As those piercing eyes were turned away again, I drew back,

step my step.

Dropping upon my knees, I began to feel for the gap in the

conservatory wall. The desire to depart from the house of the Si-Fan

was become urgent. Once safely away, I could take the necessary steps

to ensure the apprehension of the entire group. What a triumph would

be mine!

I found the opening without much difficulty and crept through into the

empty house. The vague light which penetrated the linen blinds served

to show me the length of the empty, tiled apartment. I had actually

reached the French window giving access to the drawing-room, when--the

skirl of a police whistle split the stillness ... and the sound came

from the house which I had just quitted!

To write that I was amazed were to achieve the banal. Rigid with

wonderment I stood, and clutched at the open window. So I was standing,

a man of stone, when the voice, the high-pitched, imperious,

unmistakable voice of \_Nayland Smith,\_ followed sharply upon the skirl

of the whistle:--

"Watch those French windows, Weymouth! I can hold the door!"

Like a lightning flash it came to me that the tall Hindu had been none

other than Smith disguised. From the square outside came a sudden

turmoil, a sound of racing feet, of smashing glass, of doors burst

forcibly open. Palpably, the place was surrounded; this was an

organized raid.

Irresolute, I stood there in the semi-gloom--inactive from amaze of it

all--whilst sounds of a tremendous struggle proceeded from the square

gap in the partition.

"Lights!" rose a cry, in Smith's voice again--"they have cut the

wires!"

At that I came to my senses. Plunging my hand into my pocket, I

snatched out the electric lamp ... and stepped back quickly into the

utter gloom of the room behind me.

Some one was crawling through the aperture into the conservatory!

As I watched I saw him, in the dim light, stoop to replace the movable

panel. Then, tapping upon the tiled floor as he walked, the fugitive

approached me. He was but three paces from the French window when I

pressed the button of my lamp and directed its ray fully upon his face.

"Hands up!" I said breathlessly. "I have you covered, Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN ANTI-CLIMAX

One hour later I stood in the entrance hall of our chambers in the

court adjoining Fleet Street. Some one who had come racing up the

stairs, now had inserted a key in the lock. Open swung the door--and

Nayland Smith entered, in a perfect whirl of excitement.

"Petrie! Petrie!" he cried, and seized both my hands--"you have missed

a night of nights! Man alive! we have the whole gang--the great Ki-Ming

included!" His eyes were blazing. "Weymouth has made no fewer than

twenty-five arrests, some of the prisoners being well-known Orientals.

It will be the devil's own work to keep it all quiet, but Scotland

Yard has already advised the Press."

"Congratulations, old man," I said, and looked him squarely in the eyes.

Something there must have been in my glance at variance with the

spoken words. His expression changed; he grasped my shoulder.

"\_She\_ was not there," he said, "but please God, we'll find her now.

It's only a question of time."

But, even as he spoke, the old, haunted look was creeping back into the

lean face. He gave me a rapid glance; then:--

"I might as well make a clean breast of it," he rapped. "Fu-Manchu

escaped! Furthermore, when we got lights, the woman had vanished, too."

"The woman!"

"There was a woman at this strange gathering, Petrie. Heaven only

knows who she really is. According to Fu-Manchu she is that woman of

mystery concerning whose existence strange stories are current in the

East; the future Empress of a universal empire! But of course I

decline to accept the story, Petrie! if ever the Yellow races overran

Europe, I am in no doubt respecting the identity of the person who

would ascend the throne of the world!"

"Nor I, Smith!" I cried excitedly. "Good God! he holds them all in the

palm of his hand! He has welded together the fanatics of every creed

of the East into a giant weapon for his personal use! Small wonder

that he is so formidable. But, Smith--\_who\_ is that woman?"

"Petrie!" he said slowly, and I knew that I had betrayed my secret,

"Petrie--where did you learn all this?"

I returned his steady gaze.

"I was present at the meeting of the Si-Fan," I replied steadily.

"What? What? \_You\_ were present?"

"I was present! Listen, and I will explain."

Standing there in the hallway I related, as briefly as possible, the

astounding events of the night. As I told of the woman in the train--

"That confirms my impression that Fu-Manchu was imposing upon the

others!" he snapped. "I cannot conceive of a woman recluse from some

Lamaserie, surrounded by silent attendants and trained for her exalted

destiny in the way that the legendary veiled woman of Tibet is said to

be trained, traveling alone in an English railway carriage! Did you

observe, Petrie, if her eyes were \_oblique\_ at all?"

"They did not strike me as being oblique. Why do you ask?"

"Because I strongly suspect that we have to do with none other than

Fu-Manchu's daughter! But go on."

"By heavens, Smith! You may be right! I had no idea that a Chinese

woman could possess such features."

"She may not have a Chinese mother; furthermore, there are pretty women

in China as well as in other countries; also, there are hair dyes and

cosmetics. But for Heaven's sake go on!"

I continued my all but incredible narrative; came to the point where I

discovered the straying marmoset and entered the empty house, without

provoking any comment from my listener. He stared at me with something

very like surprised admiration when I related how I had become an

unseen spectator of that singular meeting.

"And I though I had achieved the triumph of my life in gaining

admission and smuggling Weymouth and Carter into the roof, armed with

hooks and rope-ladders!" he murmured.

Now I came to the moment when, having withdrawn into the empty house,

I had heard the police whistle and had heard Smith's voice; I came to

the moment when I had found myself face to face with Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Nayland Smith's eyes were on fire now; he literally quivered with

excitement, when--

"\_Ssh!\_ what's that?" he whispered, and grasped my arm. "I heard

something move in the sitting-room, Petrie!"

"It was a coal dropping from the grate, perhaps," I said--and rapidly

continued my story, telling how, with my pistol to his head, I had

forced the Chinese doctor to descend into the hallway of the empty

house.

"Yes, yes," snapped Smith. "For God's sake go on, man! What have you

done with him? Where is he?"

I clearly detected a movement myself immediately behind the half-open

door of the sitting-room. Smith started and stared intently across my

shoulder at the doorway; then his gaze shifted and became fixed upon

my face.

"He bought his life from me, Smith."

Never can I forget the change that came over my friend's tanned

features at those words; never can I forget the pang that I suffered

to see it. The fire died out of his eyes and he seemed to grow old and

weary in a moment. None too steadily I went on:--

"He offered a price that I could not resist, Smith. Try to forgive me,

if you can. I know that I have done a dastardly thing, but--perhaps a

day may come in your own life when you will understand. He descended

with me to a cellar under the empty house, in which some one was

locked. Had I arrested Fu-Manchu this poor captive must have died there

of starvation; for no one would ever have suspected that the place had

an occupant...."

The door of the sitting-room was thrown open, and, wearing my

great-coat over the bizarre costume in which I had found her, with her

bare ankles and little red slippers peeping grotesquely from below,

and her wonderful cloud of hair rippling over the turned-up collar,

Kâramaneh came out!

Her great dark eyes were raised to Nayland Smith's with such an appeal

in them--an appeal for \_me\_--that emotion took me by the throat and

had me speechless. I could not look at either of them; I turned aside

and stared into the lighted sitting-room.

How long I stood so God knows, and I never shall; but suddenly I found

my hand seized in a vice-like grip, I looked around ... and Smith,

holding my fingers fast in that iron grasp, had his left arm about

Kâramaneh's shoulders, and his gray eyes were strangely soft, whilst

hers were hidden behind her upraised hands.

"Good old Petrie!" said Smith hoarsely. "Wake up, man; we have to get

her to a hotel before they all close, remember. \_I\_ understand, old

man. That day came in my life long years ago!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

GRAYWATER PARK

"This is a singular situation in which we find ourselves," I said,

"and one that I'm bound to admit I don't appreciate."

Nayland Smith stretched his long legs, and lay back in his chair.

"The sudden illness of Sir Lionel is certainly very disturbing," he

replied, "and had there been any possibility of returning to London

to-night, I should certainly have availed myself of it, Petrie. I

share your misgivings. We are intruders at a time like this."

He stared at me keenly, blowing a wreath of smoke from his lips, and

then directing his attention to the cone of ash which crowned his

cigar. I glanced, and not for the first time, toward the quaint old

doorway which gave access to a certain corridor. Then--

"Apart from the feeling that we intrude," I continued slowly, "there

is a certain sense of unrest."

"Yes," snapped Smith, sitting suddenly upright--"yes! You experience

this? Good! You are happily sensitive to this type of impression,

Petrie, and therefore quite as useful to me as a cat is useful to a

physical investigator."

He laughed in his quick, breezy fashion.

"You will appreciate my meaning," he added; "therefore I offer no

excuse for the analogy. Of course, the circumstances, as we know them,

may be responsible for this consciousness of unrest. We are neither of

us likely to forget the attempt upon the life of Sir Lionel Barton two

years ago or more. Our attitude toward sudden illness is scarcely that

of impartial observers."

"I suppose not," I admitted, glancing yet again at the still vacant

doorway by the foot of the stairs, which now the twilight was draping

in mysterious shadows.

Indeed, our position was a curious one. A welcome invitation from our

old friend, Sir Lionel Barton, the world-famous explorer, had come at

a time when a spell of repose, a glimpse of sea and awakening

countryside, and a breath of fair, untainted air were very desirable.

The position of Kâramaneh, who accompanied us, was sufficiently

unconventional already, but the presence of Mrs. Oram, the dignified

housekeeper, had rendered possible her visit to this bachelor

establishment. In fact it was largely in the interests of the girl's

health that we had accepted.

On our arrival at Graywater Park we had learnt that our host had been

stricken down an hour earlier by sudden illness. The exact nature of

his seizure I had thus far been unable to learn; but a local doctor,

who had left the Park barely ten minutes before our advent, had

strictly forbidden visitors to the sick-room. Sir Lionel's man,

Kennedy, who had served him in many strange spots in the world, was

in attendance.

So much we had gathered from Homopoulo, the Greek butler (Sir Lionel's

household had ever been eccentric). Furthermore, we learned that there

was no London train that night and no accommodation in the neighboring

village.

"Sir Lionel urgently requests you to remain," the butler had assured

us, in his flawless, monotonous English. "He trusts that you will not

be dull, and hopes to be able to see you to-morrow and to make plans

for your entertainment."

A ghostly, gray shape glided across the darkened hall--and was gone. I

started involuntarily. Then remote, fearsome, came muted howling to

echo through the ancient apartments of Graywater Park. Nayland Smith

laughed.

"That was the civet cat, Petrie!" he said. "I was startled, for a

moment, until the lamentations of the leopard family reminded me of

the fact that Sir Lionel had transferred his menagerie to Graywater!"

Truly, this was a singular household. In turn, Graywater Park had been

a fortress, a monastery, and a manor-house. Now, in the extensive

crypt below the former chapel, in an atmosphere artificially raised

to a suitably stuffy temperature, were housed the strange pets brought

by our eccentric host from distant lands. In one cage was an African

lioness, a beautiful and powerful beast, docile as a cat. Housed

under other arches were two surly hyenas, goats from the White Nile,

and an antelope of Kordofan. In a stable opening upon the garden were

a pair of beautiful desert gazelles, and near to them, two cranes and

a marabout. The leopards, whose howling now disturbed the night, were

in a large, cell-like cage immediately below the spot where of old the

chapel alter had stood.

And here were we an odd party in odd environment. I sought to make out

the time by my watch, but the growing dusk rendered it impossible.

Then, unheralded by any sound, Kâramaneh entered by the door which

during the past twenty minutes had been the focus of my gaze. The

gathering darkness precluded the possibility of my observing with

certainty, but I think a soft blush stole to her cheeks as those

glorious dark eyes rested upon me.

The beauty of Kâramaneh was not of the typed which is enhanced by

artificial lighting; it was the beauty of the palm and the pomegranate

blossom, the beauty which flowers beneath merciless suns, which expands,

like the lotus, under the skies of the East. But there, in the dusk,

as she came towards me, she looked exquisitely lovely, and graceful

with the grace of the desert gazelles which I had seen earlier in the

evening. I cannot describe her dress; I only know that she seemed very

wonderful--so wonderful that a pang; almost of terror, smote my heart,

because such sweetness should belong to \_me\_.

And then, from the shadows masking the other side of the old hall,

emerged the black figure of Homopoulo, and our odd trio obediently

paced into the somber dining-room.

A large lamp burned in the center of the table; a shaded candle was

placed before each diner; and the subdued light made play upon the

snowy napery and fine old silver without dispersing the gloom about

us. Indeed, if anything, it seemed to render it more remarkable, and

the table became a lighted oasis in the desert of the huge apartment.

One could barely discern the suits of armor and trophies which

ornamented the paneled walls; and I never failed to start nervously

when the butler appeared, somber and silent, at my elbow.

Sir Lionel Barton's \_penchant\_ for strange visitors, of which we had

had experience in the past, was exemplified in the person of Homopoulo.

I gathered that the butler (who, I must admit, seemed thoroughly to

comprehend his duties) had entered the service of Sir Lionel during

the time that the latter was pursuing his celebrated excavations upon

the traditional site of the Daedalian Labyrinth in Crete. It was

during this expedition that the death of a distant relative had made

him master of Graywater Park; and the event seemingly had inspired the

eccentric baronet to engage a suitable factotum.

His usual retinue of Malay footmen, Hindu grooms and Chinese cooks,

was missing apparently, and the rest of the household, including the

charming old housekeeper, had been at the Park for periods varying

from five to five-and-twenty years. I must admit that I welcomed the

fact; my tastes are essentially insular.

But the untimely illness of our host had cast a shadow upon the party.

I found myself speaking in a church-whisper, whilst Kâramaneh was

quite silent. That curious dinner party in the shadow desert of the

huge apartment frequently recurs in my memories of those days because

of the uncanny happening which terminated it.

Nayland Smith, who palpably had been as ill at ease as myself, and who

had not escaped the contagious habit of speaking in a hushed whisper,

suddenly began, in a loud and cheery manner, to tell us something of

the history of Graywater Park, which in his methodical way he had

looked up. It was a desperate revolt, on the part of his strenuous

spirit, against the phantom of gloom which threatened to obsess us all.

Parts of the house, it appeared, were of very great age, although

successive owners had added portions. There were fascinating

traditions connected with the place; secret rooms walled up since the

Middle Ages, a private stair whose entrance, though undiscoverable,

was said to be somewhere in the orchard to the west of the ancient

chapel. It had been built by an ancestor of Sir Lionel who had

flourished in the reign of the eighth Henry. At this point in his

reminiscences (Smith had an astonishing memory where recondite facts

were concerned) there came an interruption.

The smooth voice of the butler almost made me leap from my chair, as

he spoke out of the shadows immediately behind me.

"The '45 port, sir," he said--and proceeded to place a crusted bottle

upon the table. "Sir Lionel desires me to say that he is with you in

spirit and that he proposes the health of Dr. Petrie and his fiancée',

whom he hopes to have the pleasure of meeting in the morning."

Truly it was a singular situation, and I am unlikely ever to forget

the scene as the three of us solemnly rose to our feet and drank our

host's toast, thus proposed by proxy, under the eye of Homopoulo, who

stood a shadowy figure in the background.

The ceremony solemnly performed and the gloomy butler having departed

with a suitable message to Sir Lionel--

"I was about to tell you," resumed Nayland Smith, with a gaiety

palpably forced, "of the traditional ghost of Graywater Park. He is a

black clad priest, said to be the Spanish chaplain of the owner of the

Park in the early days of the Reformation. Owing to some little

misunderstanding with His Majesty's commissioners, this unfortunate

churchman met with an untimely death, and his shade is said to haunt

the secret room--the site of which is unknown--and to clamor upon the

door, and upon the walls of the private stair."

I thought the subject rather ill chosen, but recognized that my friend

was talking more or less at random and in desperation; indeed, failing

his reminiscences of Graywater Park, I think the demon of silence must

have conquered us completely.

"Presumably," I said, unconsciously speaking as though I feared the

sound of my own voice, "this Spanish priest was confined at some time

in the famous hidden chamber?"

"He was supposed to know the secret of a hoard of church property, and

tradition has it, that he was put to the question in some gloomy

dungeon ..."

He ceased abruptly; in fact the effect was that which must have

resulted had the speaker been suddenly stricken down. But the deadly

silence which ensued was instantly interrupted. My heart seemed to

be clutched as though by fingers of ice; a stark and supernatural

horror held me riveted in my chair.

For as though Nayland Smith's words had been heard by the ghostly

inhabitant of Graywater Park, as though the tortured priest sought

once more release from his age-long sufferings--there came echoing,

hollowly and remotely, as if from a subterranean cavern, the sound

of \_knocking\_.

From whence it actually proceeded I was wholly unable to determine.

At one time it seemed to surround us, as though not one but a hundred

prisoners were beating upon the paneled walls of the huge, ancient

apartment.

Faintly, so faintly, that I could not be sure if I heard aright,

there came, too, a stifled cry. Louder grew the the frantic beating

and louder ... then it ceased abruptly.

"Merciful God!" I whispered--"what was it? What was it?"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE EAST TOWER

With a cigarette between my lips I sat at the open window, looking

out upon the skeleton trees of the orchard; for the buds of early

spring were only just beginning to proclaim themselves.

The idea of sleep was far from my mind. The attractive modern

furniture of the room could not deprive the paneled walls of the musty

antiquity which was their birthright. This solitary window deeply set

and overlooking the orchard upon which the secret stair was said to

open, struck a note of more remote antiquity, casting back beyond the

carousing days of the Stuart monarchs to the troublous time of the

Middle Ages.

An air of ghostly evil had seemed to arise like a miasma within the

house from the moment that we had been disturbed by the unaccountable

rapping. It was at a late hour that we had separated, and none of us,

I think, welcomed the breaking up of our little party. Mrs. Oram, the

housekeeper, had been closely questioned by Smith--for Homopoulo, as a

new-comer, could not be expected to know anything of the history of

Graywater Park. The old lady admitted the existence of the tradition

which Nayland Smith had in some way unearthed, but assured us that

never, in her time, had the uneasy spirit declared himself. She was

ignorant (or, like the excellent retainer that she was, professed to

be ignorant) of the location of the historic chamber and staircase.

As for Homopoulo, hitherto so irreproachably imperturbable, I had

rarely seen a man in such a state of passive panic. His dark face was

blanched to the hue of dirty parchment and his forehead dewed with

cold perspiration. I mentally predicted an early resignation in the

household of Sir Lionel Barton. Homopoulo might be an excellent butler,

but his superstitious Greek nature was clearly incapable of sustaining

existence beneath the same roof with a family ghost, hoary though the

specter's antiquity might be.

Where the skeleton shadows of the fruit trees lay beneath me on the

fresh green turf my fancy persistently fashioned a black-clad figure

flitting from tree to tree. Sleep indeed was impossible. Once I

thought I detected the howling of the distant leopards.

Somewhere on the floor above me, Nayland Smith, I knew, at that moment

would be restlessly pacing his room, the exact situation of which I

could not identify, because of the quaint, rambling passages whereby

one approached it. It was in regard to Kâramaneh, however, that my

misgivings were the keenest. Already her position had been strange

enough, in those unfamiliar surroundings, but what tremors must have

been hers now in the still watches of the night, following the ghostly

manifestations which had so dramatically interrupted Nayland Smith's

story, I dared not imagine. She had been allotted an apartment

somewhere upon the ground floor, and Mrs. Oram, whose motherly

interest in the girl had touched me deeply, had gone with her to her

room, where no doubt her presence had done much to restore the girl's

courage.

Graywater Park stood upon a well-wooded slope, and, to the southwest,

starting above the trees almost like a giant Spanish priest, showed a

solitary tower. With a vague and indefinite interest I watched it. It

was Monkswell, an uninhabited place belonging to Sir Lionel's estate

and dating, in part, to the days of King John. Flicking the ash from

my cigarette, I studied the ancient tower wondering idly what deeds

had had their setting within its shadows, since the Angevin monarch,

in whose reign it saw the light, had signed the Magna Charta.

This was a perfect night, and very still. Nothing stirred, within or

without Greywater Park. Yet I was conscious of a definite disquietude

which I could only suppose to be ascribable to the weird events of

the evening, but which seemed rather to increase than to diminish.

I tossed the end of my cigarette out into the darkness, determined to

turn in, although I had never felt more wide awake in my life. One

parting glance I cast into the skeleton orchard and was on the point

of standing up, when--although no breezed stirred--a shower of ivy

leaves rained down upon my head!

Brushing them away irritably, I looked up--and a second shower dropped

fully upon my face and filled my eyes with dust. I drew back, checking

an exclamation. What with the depth of the embrasure, due to the great

thickness of the wall, and the leafy tangle above the window, I could

see for no great distance up the face of the building; but a faint

sound of rustling and stumbling which proceeded from somewhere above

me proclaimed that some one, or something, was climbing either up or

down the wall of the corner tower in which I was housed!

Partially removing the dust from my smarting eyes, I returned to the

embrasure, and stepping from the chair on to the deep ledge, I grasped

the corner of the quaint, diamond-paned window, which I had opened to

its fullest extent, and craned forth.

Now I could see the ivy-grown battlements surmounting the tower (the

east wing, in which my room was situated, was the oldest part of

Graywater Park). Sharply outlined against the cloudless sky they

showed ... and the black silhouette of a man's head and shoulders

leant over directly above me!

I drew back sharply. The climber, I thought, had not seen me, although

he was evidently peering down at my window. What did it mean?

As I crouched in the embrasure, a sudden giddiness assailed me, which

at first I ascribed to a sympathetic nervous action due to having seen

the man poised there at that dizzy height. But it increased, I swayed

forward, and clutched at the wall to save myself. A deadly nausea

overcame me ... and a deadly doubt leapt to my mind.

In the past, Sir Lionel Barton had had spies in his household; what

if the dark-faced Greek, Homopoulo, were another of these? I thought

of the '45 port, of the ghostly rapping; and I thought of the man who

crouched upon the roof of the tower above my open window.

My symptoms now were unmistakable; my head throbbed and my vision grew

imperfect; there had to be an opiate in the wine!

I almost fell back into the room. Supporting myself by means of the

chair, the chest of drawers, and finally, the bed-rail, I got to my

grip, and with weakening fingers, extracted the little medicine-chest

which was invariably my traveling companion.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

Grimly pitting my will against the drug, but still trembling weakly

from the result of the treatment, internal and subcutaneous, which I

had adopted, I staggered to the door out into the corridor and up the

narrow, winding stairs to Smith's room. I carried an electric

pocket-lamp, and by its light I found my way to the triangular,

paneled landing.

I tried the handle. As I had expected, the door was locked. I beat

upon it with my fist.

"Smith!" I cried--"Smith!"

There was no reply.

Again I clamored; awaking ancient echoes within the rooms and all

about me. But nothing moved and no answering voice rewarded my efforts;

the other rooms were seemingly unoccupied, and Smith--was drugged!

My senses in disorder, and a mist dancing before my eyes, I went

stumbling down into the lower corridor. At the door of my own room I

paused; a new fact had suddenly been revealed to me, a fact which the

mazy windings of the corridors had hitherto led me to overlook. Smith's

room was also in the east tower, and must be directly above mine!

"My God!" I whispered, thinking of the climber--"he has been murdered!"

I staggered into my room and clutched at the bed-rail to support

myself, for my legs threatened to collapse beneath me. How should I

act? That we were victims of a cunning plot, that the deathful Si-Fan

had at last wreaked its vengeance upon Nayland Smith I could not doubt.

My brain reeled, and a weakness, mental and physical, threatened to

conquer me completely. Indeed, I think I must have succumbed, sapped

as my strength had been by the drug administered to me, if the sound

of a creaking stair had not arrested my attention and by the menace

which it conveyed afforded a new stimulus.

Some one was creeping down from the landing above--coming to my room!

The creatures of the Yellow doctor, having despatched Nayland Smith,

were approaching stealthily, stair by stair, to deal with \_me!\_

From my grip I took out the Browning pistol. The Chinese doctor's

servants should have a warm reception. I burned to avenge my friend,

who I was persuaded, lay murdered in the room above. I partially

closed the door and took up a post immediately behind it. Nearer came

the stealthy footsteps--nearer.... Now the one who approached had

turned the angle of the passage....

Within sight of my door he seemed to stop; a shaft of white light

crept through the opening, across the floor and on to the wall beyond.

A moment it remained so--then was gone. The room became plunged in

darkness.

Gripping the Browning with nervous fingers I waited, listening

intently; but the silence remained unbroken. My gaze set upon the spot

where the head of this midnight visitant might be expected to appear,

I almost held my breath during the ensuing moments of frightful

suspense.

The door was opening; slowly--slowly--by almost imperceptible degrees.

I held the pistol pointed rigidly before me and my gaze remained fixed

intently on the dimly seen opening. I suppose I acted as ninety-nine

men out of a hundred would have done in like case. Nothing appeared.

Then a voice--a voice that seemed to come from somewhere under the

floor snapped:--

"Good God! it's Petrie!"

I dropped my gaze instantly ... and there, looking up at me from the

floor at my feet, I vaguely discerned the outline of a human head!

"Smith!" I whispered.

Nayland Smith--for indeed it was none other--stood up and entered the

room.

"Thank God you are safe, old man," he said. "But in waiting for one

who is stealthily entering a room, don't, as you love me, take it for

granted that he will enter \_upright\_. I could have shot you from the

floor with ease! But, mercifully, even in the darkness, I recognized

your Arab slippers!"

"Smith," I said, my heart beating wildly, "I thought you were drugged--

murdered. The port contained an opiate."

"I guessed as much!" snapped Smith. "But despite the excellent tuition

of Dr. Fu-Manchu, I am still childishly trustful; and the fact that I

did not partake of the crusted '45 was not due to any suspicions which

I entertained at that time."

"But, Smith, I saw you drink some port."

"I regret to contradict you, Petrie, but you must be aware that the

state of my liver--due to a long residence in Burma--does not permit

me to indulge in the luxury of port. My share of the '45 now reposes

amid the moss in the tulip-bowl, which you may remember decorated the

dining table! Not desiring to appear churlish, by means of a simple

feat of legerdemain I drank your health and future happiness in claret!

"For God's sake what is going on, Smith? Some one climbed from your

window."

"I climbed from my window!"

"What!" I said dazedly--"it was you! But what does it all mean?

Kâramaneh----"

"It is for her I fear, Petrie, now. We have not a moment to waste!"

He made for the door.

"Sir Lionel must be warned at all cost!" I cried.

"Impossible!" snapped Smith.

"What do you mean?"

"Sir Lionel has disappeared!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DUNGEON

We were out in the corridor now, Smith showing the way with the light

of his electric pocket-lamp. My mind was clear enough, but I felt as

weak as a child.

"You look positively ghastly, old man," rapped Smith, "which is no

matter for wonder. I have yet to learn how it happened that you are

not lying insensible, or dead, as a result of the drugged wine. When

I heard some one moving in your room, it never occurred to me that it

was \_you\_."

"Smith," I said--"the house seems as still as death."

"You, Kâramaneh, and myself are the only occupants of the east wing.

Homopoulo saw to that."

"Then he----"

"He is a member of the Si-Fan, a creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu--yes,

beyond all doubt! Sir Lionel is unfortunate--as ever--in his choice

of servants. I blame my own stupidity entirely, Petrie; and I pray

that my enlightenment has not come too late."

"What does it all mean?--what have you learnt?"

"Mind these three steps," warned Smith, glancing back. "I found my

mind persistently dwelling upon the matter of that weird rapping,

Petrie, and I recollected the situation of Sir Lionel's room, on the

southeast front. A brief inspection revealed the fact that, by means

of a kindly branch of ivy, I could reach the roof of the east tower

from my window."

"Well?"

"One may walk from there along the roof of the southeast front, and

by lying face downwards at the point where it projects above the main

entrance look into Sir Lionel's room!"

"I saw you go!"

"I feared that some one was watching me, but that it was you I had

never supposed. Neither Barton nor his man are in that room, Petrie!

They have been spirited away! This is Kâramaneh's door."

He grasped me by the arm, at the same time directing the light upon a

closed door before which we stood. I raised my fist and beat upon the

panels; then, every muscle tensed and my heart throbbing wildly, I

listened for the girl's voice.

Not a sound broke that deathly stillness except the beating of my own

heart, which, I thought, must surely be audible to my companion.

Frantically I hurled myself against the stubborn oak, but Smith thrust

me back.

"Useless, Petrie!" he said--"useless. This room is in the base of the

east tower, yours is above it and mine at the top. The corridors

approaching the three floors deceive one, but the fact remains. I have

no positive evidence, but I would wager all I possess that there is a

stair in the thickness of the wall, and hidden doors in the paneling

of the three apartments. The Yellow group has somehow obtained

possession of a plan of the historic secret passages and chambers of

Graywater Park. Homopoulo is the spy in the household; and Sir Lionel,

with his man Kennedy, was removed directly the invitation to us had

been posted. The group will know by now that we have escaped them, but

Kâramaneh ..."

"Smith!" I groaned, "Smith! What can we do? What has befallen her? ..."

"This way!" he snapped. "We are not beaten yet!"

"We must arouse the servants!"

"Why? It would be sheer waste of priceless time. There are only three

men who actually sleep in the house (excepting Homopoulo) and these

are in the northwest wing. No, Petrie; we must rely upon ourselves."

He was racing recklessly along the tortuous corridors and up the oddly

placed stairways of that old-world building. My anguish had reinforced

the atropine which I had employed as an antidote to the opiate in the

wine, and now my blood, that had coursed sluggishly, leapt through my

veins like fire and I burned with a passionate anger.

Into a large and untidy bedroom we burst. Books and papers littered

about the floor; curios, ranging from mummied cats and ibises to

Turkish yataghans and Zulu assegais, surrounded the place in riotous

disorder. Beyond doubt this was the apartment of Sir Lionel Barton.

A lamp burned upon a table near to the disordered bed, and a

discolored Greek statuette of Orpheus lay overturned on the carpet

close beside it.

"Homopoulo was on the point of leaving this room at the moment that I

peered in at the window," said Smith, breathing heavily. "From here

there is another entrance to the secret passages. Have your pistol

ready."

He stepped across the disordered room to a little alcove near the foot

of the bed, directing the ray of the pocket-lamp upon the small,

square paneling.

"Ah!" he cried, a note of triumph in his voice--"he has left the door

ajar! A visit of inspection was not anticipated to-night, Petrie!

Thank God for an Indian liver and a suspicious mind."

He disappeared into a yawning cavity which now I perceived to exist in

the wall. I hurried after him, and found myself upon roughly fashioned

stone steps in a very low and narrow descending passage. Over his

shoulder--

"Note the direction," said Smith breathlessly. "We shall presently

find ourselves at the base of the east tower."

Down we went and down, the ray of the electric lamp always showing

more steps ahead, until at last these terminated in a level, arched

passage, curving sharply to the right. Two paces more brought us to a

doorway, less, than four feet high, approached by two wide steps. A

blackened door, having a most cumbersome and complicated lock, showed

in the recess.

Nayland Smith bent and examined the mechanism intently.

"Freshly oiled!" he commented. "You know into whose room it opens?"

Well enough I knew, and, detecting that faint, haunting perfume which

spoke of the dainty personality of Kâramaneh, my anger blazed up

anew. Came a faint sound of metal grating upon metal, and Smith pulled

open the door, which turned outward upon the steps, and bent further

forward, sweeping the ray of light about the room beyond.

"Empty, of course!" he muttered. "Now for the base of these damned

nocturnal operations."

He descended the steps and began to flash the light all about the

arched passageway wherein we stood.

"The present dining-room of Graywater Park lies almost due south of

this spot," he mused. "Suppose we try back."

We retraced our steps to the foot of the stair. In the wall on their

left was an opening, low down against the floor and little more than

three feet high; it reminded me of some of the entrances to those

seemingly interminable passages whereby one approaches the sepulchral

chambers of the Egyptian Pyramids.

"Now for it!" snapped Smith. "Follow me closely."

Down he dropped, and, having the lamp thrust out before him, began to

crawl into the tunnel. As his heels disappeared, and only a faint light

outlined the opening, I dropped upon all fours in turn, and began

laboriously to drag myself along behind him. The atmosphere was damp,

chilly, and evil-smelling; therefore, at the end of some ten or twelve

yards of this serpentine crawling, when I saw Smith, ahead of me, to

be standing erect, I uttered a stifled exclamation of relief. The

thought of Kâramaneh having been dragged through this noisome hole

was one I dared not dwell upon.

A long, narrow passage now opened up, its end invisible from where we

stood. Smith hurried forward. For the first thirty of forty paces the

roof was formed of massive stone slabs; then its character changed;

the passage became lower, and one was compelled frequently to lower the

head in order to avoid the oaken beams which crossed it.

"We are passing under the dining-room," said Smith. "It was from here

the sound of beating first came!"

"What do you mean?"

"I have built up a theory, which remains to be proved, Petrie. In my

opinion a captive of the Yellow group escaped to-night and sought to

summon assistance, but was discovered and overpowered."

"Sir Lionel?"

"Sir Lionel, or Kennedy--yes, I believe so."

Enlightenment came to me, and I understood the pitiable condition into

which the Greek butler had been thrown by the phenomenon of the

ghostly knocking. But Smith hurried on, and suddenly I saw that the

passage had entered upon a sharp declivity; and now both roof and

walls were composed of crumbling brickwork. Smith pulled up, and thrust

back a hand to detain me.

"\_Ssh!\_" he hissed, and grasped my arm.

Silent, intently still, we stood and listened. The sound of a guttural

voice was clearly distinguishable from somewhere close at hand!

Smith extinguished the lamp. A faint luminance proclaimed itself

directly ahead. Still grasping my arm, Smith began slowly to advance

toward the light. One--two--three--four--five paces we crept onward ...

and I found myself looking through an archway into a medieval

torture-chamber!

Only a part of the place was visible to me, but its character was

unmistakable. Leg-irons, boots and thumb-screws hung in racks upon

the fungi-covered wall. A massive, iron-studded door was open at the

further end of the chamber, and on the threshold stood Homopoulo,

holding a lantern in his hand.

Even as I saw him, he stepped through, followed by on of those short,

thick-set Burmans of whom Dr. Fu-Manchu had a number among his

entourage; they were members of the villainous robber bands notorious

in India as the dacoits. Over one broad shoulder, slung sackwise, the

dacoit carried a girl clad in scanty white drapery....

Madness seized me, the madness of sorrow and impotent wrath. For, with

Kâramaneh being borne off before my eyes, I dared not fire at her

abductors lest I should strike \_her\_!

Nayland Smith uttered a loud cry, and together we hurled ourselves

into the chamber. Heedless of what, of whom, else it might shelter,

we sprang for the group in the distant doorway. A memory is mine of

the dark, white face of Homopoulo, peering, wild-eyed, over the

lantern, of the slim, white-clad form of the lovely captive seeming to

fade into the obscurity of th passage beyond.

Then, with bleeding knuckles, with wild imprecations bubbling from my

lips, I was battering upon the mighty door--which had been slammed in

my face at the very instant that I had gained it.

"Brace up, man!--Brace up!" cried Smith, and in his strenuous, grimly

purposeful fashion, he shouldered me away from the door. "A battering

ram could not force that timber; we must seek another way!"

I staggered, weakly, back into the room. Hand raised to my head, I

looked about me. A lantern stood in a niche in one wall, weirdly

illuminating that place of ghastly memories; there were braziers,

branding-irons, with other instruments dear to the Black Ages, about

me--and gagged, chained side by side against the opposite wall, lay

Sir Lionel Barton and another man unknown to me!

Already Nayland Smith was bending over the intrepid explorer, whose

fierce blue eyes glared out from the sun-tanned face madly, whose

gray hair and mustache literally bristled with rage long repressed.

I choked down the emotions that boiled and seethed within me, and

sought to release the second captive, a stockily-built, clean-shaven

man. First I removed the length of toweling which was tied firmly

over his mouth; and--

"Thank you, sir," he said composedly. "The keys of these irons are on

the ledge there beside the lantern. I broke the first ring I was

chained to, but the Yellow devils overhauled me, all manacled as I

was, half-way along the passage before I could attract your attention,

and fixed me up to another and stronger ring!"

Ere he had finished speaking, the keys were in my hands, and I had

unlocked the gyves from both the captives. Sir Lionel Barton, his gag

removed, unloosed a torrent of pent-up wrath.

"The hell-fiends drugged me!" he shouted. "That black villain Homopoulo

doctored my tea! I woke in this damnable cell, the secret of which has

been lost for generations!" He turned blazing blue eyes upon Kennedy.

"How did \_you\_ come to be trapped?" he demanded unreasonably. "I

credited you with a modicum of brains!"

"Homopoulo came running from your room, sir, and told me you were

taken suddenly ill and that a doctor must be summoned without delay."

"Well, well, you fool!"

"Dr. Hamilton was away, sir."

"A false call beyond doubt!" snapped Smith.

"Therefore I went for the new doctor, Dr. Magnus, in the village. He

came at once and I showed him up to your room. He sent Mrs. Oram out,

leaving only Homopoulo and myself there, except yourself."

"Well?"

"Sandbagged!" explained the man nonchalantly. "Dr. Magnus, who is some

kind of dago, is evidently one of the gang."

"Sir Lionel!" cried Smith--"where does the passage lead to beyond

that doorway?

"God knows!" was the answer, which dashed my last hope to the ground.

"I have no more idea than yourself. Perhaps ..."

He ceased speaking. A sound had interrupted him, which, in those grim

surroundings, lighted by the solitary lantern, translated my thoughts

magically to Ancient Rome, to the Rome of Tigellinus, to the dungeons

of Nero's Circus. Echoing eerily along the secret passages it came--

the roaring and snarling of the lioness and the leopards.

Nayland Smith clapped his hand to his brow and stared at me almost

frenziedly, then--

"God guard her!" he whispered. "Either their plans, wherever they got

them, are inaccurate, or in their panic they have mistaken the way." ...

Wild cries now were mingling with the snarling of the beasts....

"They have blundered into the old crypt!"

How we got out of the secret labyrinth of Graywater Park into the

grounds and around the angle of the west wing to the ivy-grown,

pointed door, where once the chapel had bee, I do not know. Light

seemed to spring up about me, and half-clad servants to appear out of

the void. Temporarily I was insane.

Sir Lionel Barton was behaving like a madman too, and like a madman he

tore at the ancient bolts and precipitated himself into the stone-paved

cloister barred with the moon-cast shadows of the Norman pillars. From

behind the iron bars of the home of the leopards came now a fearsome

growling and scuffling.

Smith held the light with a steady hand, whilst Kennedy forced the

heavy bolts of the crypt door.

In leapt the fearless baronet among his savage pets, and in the ray

of light from the electric lamp I saw that which turned my sick with

horror. Prone beside a yawning gap in the floor lay Homopoulo, his

throat torn indescribably and his white shirt-front smothered in

blood. A black leopard, having its fore-paws upon the dead man's

breast, turned blazing eyes upon us; a second crouched beside him.

Heaped up in a corner of the place, amongst the straw and litter of

the lair, lay the Burmese dacoit, his sinewy fingers embedded in the

throat of the third and largest leopard--which was dead--whilst the

creature's gleaming fangs were buried in the tattered flesh of the

man's shoulder.

Upon the straw beside the two, her slim, bare arms outstretched and

her head pillowed upon them, so that her rippling hair completely

concealed her face, lay Kâramaneh....

In a trice Barton leapt upon the great beast standing over Homopoulo,

had him by the back of the neck and held him in his powerful hands

whining with fear and helpless as a rat in the grip of a terrier. The

second leopard fled into the inner lair.

So much I visualized in a flash; then all faded, and I knelt alone

beside her whose life was my life, in a world grown suddenly empty

and still.

Through long hours of agony I lived, hours contained within the span

of seconds, the beloved head resting against my shoulder, whilst I

searched for signs of life and dreaded to find ghastly wounds.... At

first I could not credit the miracle; I could not receive the wondrous

truth.

Kâramaneh was quite uninjured and deep in drugged slumber!

"The leopards thought her dead," whispered Smith brokenly, "and never

touched her!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THREE NIGHTS LATER

"Listen!" cried Sir Lionel Barton.

He stood upon the black rug before the massive, carven mantelpiece, a

huge man in an appropriately huge setting.

I checked the words on my lips, and listened intently. Within

Graywater Park all was still, for the hour was late. Outside, the

rain was descending in a deluge, its continuous roar drowning any

other sound that might have been discernible. Then, above it, I

detected a noise that at first I found difficult to define.

"The howling of the leopards!" I suggested.

Sir Lionel shook his tawny head with impatience. Then, the sound

growing louder, suddenly I knew it for what it was.

"Some one shouting!" I exclaimed--"some one who rides a galloping

horse!"

"Coming here!" added Sir Lionel. "Hark! he is at the door!"

A bell rang furiously, again and again sending its brazen clangor

echoing through the great apartments and passages of Graywater.

"There goes Kennedy."

Above the sibilant roaring of the rain I could hear some one releasing

heavy bolts and bars. The servants had long since retired, as also had

Kâramaneh; but Sir Lionel's man remained wakeful and alert.

Sir Lionel made for the door, and I, standing up, was about to follow

him, when Kennedy appeared, in his wake a bedraggled groom, hatless,

and pale to the lips. His frightened eyes looked from face to face.

"Dr. Petrie?" he gasped interrogatively.

"Yes!" I said, a sudden dread assailing me. "What is it?"

"Gad! it's Hamilton's man!" cried Barton.

"Mr. Nayland Smith, sir," continued the groom brokenly--and all my

fears were realized. "He's been attacked, sir, on the road from the

station, and Dr. Hamilton, to whose house he was carried----"

"Kennedy!" shouted Sir Lionel, "get the Rolls-Royce out! Put your

horse up here, my man, and come with us!"

He turned abruptly ... as the groom, grasping at the wall, fell

heavily to the floor.

"Good God!" I cried--"What's the matter with him?"

I bent over the prostrate man, making a rapid examination.

"His head! A nasty blow. Give me a hand, Sir Lionel; we must get him

on to a couch."

The unconscious man was laid upon a Chesterfield, and, ably assisted

by the explorer, who was used to coping with such hurts as this, I

attended to him as best I could. One of the men-servants had been

aroused, and, just as he appeared in the doorway, I had the

satisfaction of seeing Dr. Hamilton's groom open his eyes, and look

about him, dazedly.

"Quick," I said. "Tell me--what hurt you?"

The man raised his hand to his head and groaned feebly.

"Something came \_whizzing\_, sir," he answered. "There was no report,

and I saw nothing. I don't know what it can have been----"

"Where did this attack take place?"

"Between here and the village, sir; just by the coppice at the

cross-roads on top of Raddon Hill."

"You had better remain here for the present," I said, and gave a few

words of instruction to the man whom we had aroused.

"This way," cried Barton, who had rushed out of the room, his huge

frame reappearing in the door-way; "the car is ready."

My mind filled with dreadful apprehensions, I passed out on to the

carriage sweep. Sir Lionel was already at the wheel.

"Jump in, Kennedy," he said, when I had taken a seat beside him; and

the man sprang into the car.

Away we shot, up the narrow lane, lurched hard on the bend--and were

off at ever growing speed toward the hills, where a long climb

awaited the car.

The head-light picked out the straight road before us, and Barton

increased the pace, regardless of regulations, until the growing slope

made itself felt and the speed grew gradually less; above the

throbbing of the motor, I could hear, now, the rain in the

overhanging trees.

I peered through the darkness, up the road, wondering if we were near

to the spot where the mysterious attack had been made upon Dr.

Hamilton's groom. I decided that we were just passing the place, and

to confirm my opinion, at that moment Sir Lionel swung the car around

suddenly, and plunged headlong into the black mouth of a narrow lane.

Hitherto, the roads had been fair, but now the jolting and swaying

became very pronounced.

"Beastly road!" shouted Barton--"and stiff gradient!"

I nodded.

That part of the way which was visible in front had the appearance of

a muddy cataract, through which we must force a path.

Then, as abruptly as it had commenced, the rain ceased; and at almost

the same moment came an angry cry from behind.

The canvas hood made it impossible to see clearly in the car, but,

turning quickly, I perceived Kennedy, with his cap off, rubbing his

close-cropped skull. He was cursing volubly.

"What is it, Kennedy?

"Somebody sniping!" cried the man. "Lucky for me I had my cap on!"

"Eh, sniping?" said Barton, glancing over his shoulder. "What d'you

mean? A stone, was it?"

"No, sir," answered Kennedy. "I don't know what it was--but it wasn't

a stone."

"Hurt much?" I asked.

"No, sir! nothing at all." But there was a note of fear in the man's

voice--fear of the unknown.

Something struck the hood with a dull drum-like thud.

"There's another, sir!" cried Kennedy. "There's some one following us!"

"Can you see any one?" came the reply. "I thought I saw something

then, about twenty yards behind. It's so dark."

"Try a shot!" I said, passing my Browning to Kennedy.

The next moment, the crack of the little weapon sounded sharply, and I

thought I detected a vague, answering cry.

"See anything?" came from Barton.

Neither Kennedy nor I made reply; for we were both looking back down

the hill. Momentarily, the moon had peeped from the cloud-banks, and

where, three hundreds yards behind, the bordering trees were few, a

patch of dim light spread across the muddy road--and melted away as a

new blackness gathered.

But, in the brief space, three figures had shown, only for an instant--

but long enough for us both to see that they were those of three gaunt

men, seemingly clad in scanty garments. What weapons they employed I

could not conjecture; but we were pursued by three of Dr. Fu-Manchu's

dacoits!

Barton growled something savagely, and ran the car to the left of the

road, as the gates of Dr. Hamilton's house came in sight.

A servant was there, ready to throw them open; and Sir Lionel swung

around on to the drive, and drove ahead, up the elm avenue to where the

light streamed through the open door on to the wet gravel. The house

was a blaze of lights, every window visible being illuminated; and Mrs.

Hamilton stood in the porch to greet us.

"Doctor Petrie?" she asked, nervously, as we descended.

"I am he," I said. "How is Mr. Smith?"

"Still insensible," was the reply.

Passing a knot of servants who stood at the foot of the stairs like a

little flock of frightened sheep--we made our way into the room where

my poor friend lay.

Dr. Hamilton, a gray-haired man of military bearing, greeted Sir

Lionel, and the latter made me known to my fellow practitioner, who

grasped my hand, and then went straight to the bedside, tilting the

lampshade to throw the light directly upon the patient.

Nayland Smith lay with his arms outside the coverlet and his fists

tightly clenched. His thin, tanned face wore a grayish hue, and a

white bandage was about his head. He breathed stentoriously.

"We can only wait," said Dr. Hamilton, "and trust that there will be

no complications."

I clenched my fists involuntarily, but, speaking no word, turned and

passed from the room.

Downstairs in Dr. Hamilton's study was the man who had found Nayland

Smith.

"We don't know when it was done, sir," he said, answering my first

question. "Staples and me stumbled on him in the dusk, just by the big

beech--a good quarter-mile from the village. I don't know how long

he'd laid there, but it must have been for some time, as the last

rain arrived an hour earlier. No, sir, he hadn't been robbed; his

money and watch were on him but his pocketbook lay open beside him;--

though, funny as it seems, there were three five-pound notes in it!"

"Do you understand, Petrie?" cried Sir Lionel. "Smith evidently

obtained a copy of the old plan of the secret passages of Graywater

and Monkswell, sooner than he expected, and determined to return

to-night. They left him for dead, having robbed him of the plans!"

"But the attack on Dr. Hamilton's man?"

"Fu-Manchu clearly tried to prevent communication with us to-night! He

is playing for time. Depend on it, Petrie, the hour of his departure

draws near and he is afraid of being trapped at the last moment."

He began taking huge strides up and down the room, forcibly reminding

me of a caged lion.

"To think," I said bitterly, "that all our efforts have failed to

discover the secret----"

"The secret of my own property!" roared Barton--"and one known to

that damned, cunning Chinese devil!"

"And in all probability now known also to Smith----"

"And he cannot speak! ..."

"\_Who\_ cannot speak?" demanded a hoarse voice.

I turned in a flash, unable to credit my senses--and there, holding

weakly to the doorpost, stood Nayland Smith!

"Smith!" I cried reproachfully--"you should not have left your room!"

He sank into an arm-chair, assisted by Dr. Hamilton.

"My skull is fortunately thick!" he replied, a ghostly smile playing

around the corners of his mouth--"and it was a physical impossibility

for me to remain inert considering that Dr. Fu-Manchu proposes to

leave England to-night!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MONK'S PLAN

"My inquiries in the Manuscript Room of the British Museum," said

Nayland Smith, his voice momentarily growing stronger and some of the

old fire creeping back into his eyes, "have proved entirely successful."

Sir Lionel Barton, Dr. Hamilton, and myself hung upon every word; and

often I fond myself glancing at the old-fashioned clock on the

doctor's mantel-piece.

"We had very definite proof," continued Smith, "of the fact that

Fu-Manchu and company were conversant with that elaborate system of

secret rooms and passages which forms a veritable labyrinth, in, about,

and beneath Graywater Park. Some of the passages we explored. That

Sir Lionel should be ignorant of the system was not strange,

considering that he had but recently inherited the property, and that

the former owner, his kinsman, regarded the secret as lost. A

starting-point was discovered, however, in the old work on haunted

manors unearthed in the library, as you remember. There was a

reference, in the chapter dealing with Graywater, so a certain monkish

manuscript said to repose in the national collection and to contain a

plan of these passages and stairways.

"The Keeper of the Manuscripts at the Museum very courteously assisted

me in my inquiries, and the ancient parchment was placed in my hands.

Sure enough, it contained a carefully executed drawing of the hidden

ways of Graywater, the work of a monk in the distant days when

Graywater was a priory. This monk, I may add--a certain Brother Anselm--

afterwards became Abbot of Graywater."

"Very interesting!" cried sir Lionel loudly; "very interesting indeed."

"I copied the plan," resumed Smith, "with elaborate care. That labor,

unfortunately, was wasted, in part, at least. Then, in order to

confirm my suspicions on the point, I endeavored to ascertain if the

monk's MS. had been asked for at the Museum recently. The Keeper of

the Manuscripts could not recall that any student had handled the work,

prior to my own visit, during the past ten years.

"This was disappointing, and I was tempted to conclude that Fu-Manchu

had blundered on to the secret in some other way, when the Assistant

Keeper of Manuscripts put in an appearance. From him I obtained

confirmation of my theory. Three months ago a Greek gentleman--possibly,

Sir Lionel, your late butler, Homopoulo--obtained permission to consult

the MS., claiming to be engaged upon a paper for some review or another.

"At any rate, the fact was sufficient. Quite evidently, a servant of

Fu-Manchu had obtained a copy of the plan--and this within a day or

so of the death of Mr. Brangholme Burton--whose heir, Sir Lionel, you

were! I became daily impressed anew with the omniscience, the

incredible genius, of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"The scheme which we know of to compass the death, or captivity, of

our three selves and Kâramaneh was put into operation, and failed.

But, with its failure, the utility of the secret chambers was by no

means terminated. The local legend, according to which a passage

exists, linking Graywater and Monkswell, is confirmed by the monk's

plan."

"What?" cried Sir Lionel, springing to his feet--"a passage between

the Park and the old tower! My dear sir, it's impossible! Such a

passage would have to pass under the River Starn! It's only a narrow

stream, I know, but----"

"It \_does\_, or \_did\_, pass under the River Starn!" said Nayland Smith

coolly. "That it is still practicable I do not assert; what interests

me is the spot at which it terminates."

He plunged his hand into the pocket of the light overcoat which he

wore over the borrowed suit of pyjamas in which the kindly Dr. Hamilton

had clothed him. He was seeking his pipe!

"Have a cigar, Smith!" cried Sir Lionel, proffering his case--"if you

\_must\_ smoke; although I think our medical friends frowning!"

Nayland Smith took a cigar, bit off the end, and lighted up. He began

to surround himself with odorous clouds, to his evident satisfaction.

"To resume," he said; "the Spanish priest who was persecuted at

Graywater in early Reformation days and whose tortured spirit is said

to haunt the Park, held the secret of this passage, and of the

subterranean chamber in Monkswell, to which it led. His confession--

which resulted in his death at the stake!--enabled the commissioners

to recover from his chamber a quantity of church ornaments. For these

facts I am indebted to the author of the work on haunted manors.

"Our inquiry at this point touches upon things sinister and

incomprehensible. In a word, although the passage and a part of the

underground room are of unknown antiquity, it appears certain that

they were improved and enlarged by one of the abbots of Monkswell--at

a date much later than Brother Anselm's abbotship--and the place was

converted to a secret chapel----"

"A \_secret\_ chapel!" said Dr. Hamilton.

"Exactly. This was at a time in English history when the horrible

cult of Asmodeus spread from the Rhine monasteries and gained

proselytes in many religious houses of England. In this secret chapel,

wretched Churchmen, seduced to the abominable views of the abbot,

celebrated the Black Mass!"

"My God!" I whispered--"small wonder that the place is reputed to be

haunted!"

"Small wonder," cried Nayland Smith, with all his old nervous vigor,

"that Dr. Fu-Manchu selected it as an ideal retreat in times of danger!"

"What! the chapel?" roared Sir Lionel.

"Beyond doubt! Well knowing the penalty of discovery, those old

devil-worshipers had chosen a temple from which they could escape in

an emergency. There is a short stair from the chamber into the cave

which, as you may know, exists in the cliff adjoining Monkswell."

Smith's eyes were blazing now, and he was on his feet, pacing the

floor, an odd figure, with his bandaged skull and inadequate garments,

biting on the already extinguished cigar as though it had been a pipe.

"Returning to our rooms, Petrie," he went on rapidly, "who should I run

into but Summers! You remember Summers, the Suez Canal pilot whom you

met at Ismailia two years ago? He brought the yacht through the Canal,

from Suez, on which I suspect Ki-Ming came to England. She is a big

boat--used to be on the Port Said and Jaffa route before a wealthy

Chinaman acquired her--through an Egyptian agent--for his personal use.

"All the crews, Summers told me, were Asiatics, and little groups of

natives lined the Canal and performed obeisances as the vessel passed.

Undoubtedly they had that woman on board, Petrie, the Lady of the

Si-Fan, who escaped, together with Fu-Manchu, when we raided the

meeting in London! Like a fool I came racing back here without

advising you; and, all alone, my mind occupied with the tremendous

import of these discoveries, started, long after dusk, to walk to

Graywater Park."

He shrugged his shoulders whimsically, and raised one hand to his

bandaged head.

"Fu-Manchu employs weapons both of the future and of the past," he

said. "My movements had been watched, of course; I was mad. Some one,

probably a dacoit, laid me low with a ball of clay propelled form a

sling of the Ancient Persian pattern! I actually saw him ... then saw,

and knew, no more!

"Smith!" I cried--whilst Sir Lionel Barton and Dr. Hamilton stared at

one another, dumbfounded--"you think \_he\_ is on the point of flying

from England----"

"The Chinese yacht, \_Chanak-Kampo,\_ is lying two miles off the coast

and in the sight of the tower of Monkswell!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SHADOW ARMY

The scene of our return to Graywater Park is destined to live in my

memory for ever. The storm, of which the violet rainfall had been a

prelude, gathered blackly over the hills. Ebon clouds lowered upon us

as we came racing to the gates. Then the big car was spinning around

the carriage sweep, amid a deathly stillness of Nature indescribably

gloomy and ominous. I have said, a stillness of nature; but, as

Kennedy leapt out and ran up the steps to the door, from the distant

cages wherein Sire Lionel kept his collection of rare beasts proceeded

the angry howling of the leopards and such a wild succession of roars

from the African lioness that I stared at our eccentric host

questioningly.

"It's the gathering storm," he explained. "These creatures are

peculiarly susceptible to atmospheric disturbances."

Now the door was thrown open, and, standing in the lighted hall,

a picture fair to look upon in her dainty kimono and little red,

high-heeled slippers, stood Kâramaneh!

I was beside her in a moment; for the lovely face was pale and there

was a wildness in her eyes which alarmed me.

"\_He\_ is somewhere near!" she whispered, clinging to me. "Some great

danger threatens. Where have you been?--what has happened?"

"Smith was attacked on his way back from London," I replied. "But, as

you see, he is quite recovered. We are in no danger; and I insist that

you go back to bed. We shall tell you all about it in the morning."

Rebellion blazed up in her wonderful eyes instantly--and as quickly

was gone, leaving them exquisitely bright. Two tears, like twin pearls,

hung upon the curved black lashes. It made my blood course faster to

watch this lovely Eastern girl conquering the barbaric impulses that

sometimes flamed up within, her, because \_I\_ willed it; indeed this was

a miracle that I never tired of witnessing.

Mrs. Oram, the white-haired housekeeper, placed her arm in motherly

fashion about the girl's slim waist.

"She wants to stay in my room until the trouble is all over," she said

in her refined, sweet voice.

"You are very good, Mrs. Oram," I replied. "Take care of her."

One long, reassuring glance I gave Kâramaneh, then turned and

followed Smith and Sir Lionel up the winding oak stair. Kennedy came

close behind me, carrying one of the acetylene head-lamps of the car.

And--

"Just listen to the lioness, sir!" he whispered. "It's not the

gathering storm that's making her so restless. Jungle beasts grow

quiet, as a rule, when there's thunder about."

The snarling of the great creature was plainly audible, distant though

we were from her cage.

"Through your room, Barton!" snapped Nayland Smith, when we gained the

top corridor.

He was his old, masterful self once more, and his voice was vibrant

with that suppressed excitement which I knew well. Into the disorderly

sleeping apartment of the baronet we hurried, and Smith made for the

recess near the bed which concealed a door in the paneling.

"Cautiously here!" cried Smith. "Follow immediately behind me, Kennedy,

and throw the beam ahead. Hold the lamp well to the left."

In we filed, into that ancient passage which had figured in many a

black deed but had never served the ends of a more evil plotter than

the awful Chinaman who so recently had rediscovered it.

Down we marched, and down, but not to the base of the tower, as I had

anticipated. At a point which I judged to be about level with the

first floor of the house, Smith--who had been audibly counting the

steps--paused, and began to examine the seemingly unbroken masonry

of the wall.

"We have to remember," he muttered, "that this passage may be blocked

up or otherwise impassable, and that Fu-Manchu may know of another

entrance. Furthermore, since the plan is lost, I have to rely upon

my memory for the exact position of the door."

He was feeling about in the crevices between the stone blocks of which

the wall was constructed.

"Twenty-one steps," he muttered; "I feel certain."

Suddenly it seemed that his quest had proved successful.

"Ah!" he cried--"the ring!"

I saw that he had drawn out a large iron ring from some crevice in

which it had been concealed.

"Stand back, Kennedy!" he warned.

Kennedy moved on to a lower step--as Smith, bringing all his weight

to bear upon the ring, turned the huge stone slab upon its hidden

pivot, so that it fell back upon the stair with a reverberating boom.

We all pressed forward to peer into the black cavity. Kennedy moving

the light, a square well was revealed, not more than three feet across.

Foot-holes were cut at intervals down the further side.

"H'm!" said Smith--"I was hardly prepared for this. The method of

descent that occurs to me is to lean back against one side and trust

one's weight entirely to the foot-holes on the other. A shaft appeared

in the plan, I remember, but I had formed no theory respecting the

means provided for descending it. Tilt the lamp forward, Kennedy.

Good! I can see the floor of the passage below; only about fifteen

feet or so down."

He stretched his foot across, placed it in the niche and began to

descend.

"Kennedy next!" came his muffled voice, "with the lamp. Its light will

enable you others to see the way."

Down went Kennedy without hesitation, the lamp swung from his right

arm.

"I will bring up the rear," said Sir Lionel Barton.

Whereupon I descended. I had climbed down about half-way when, from

below, came a loud cry, a sound of scuffling, and a savage exclamation

from Smith. Then----

"We're right, Petrie! This passage was recently used by Fu-Manchu!"

I gained the bottom of the well, and found myself standing in the

entrance to an arched passage. Kennedy was directing the light of the

lamp down upon the floor.

"You see, the door was guarded" said Nayland Smith.

"What!"

"Puff adder!" he snapped, and indicated a small snake whose head was

crushed beneath his heel.

Sir Lionel now joined us; and, a silent quartette, we stood staring

from the dead reptile into the damp and evil-smelling tunnel. A

distant muttering and rumbling rolled, echoing awesomely along it.

"For Heaven's sake what was that, sir?" whispered Kennedy.

"It was the thunder," answered Nayland Smith. "The storm is breaking

over the hills. Steady with the lamp, my man."

We had proceeded for some three hundred yards, and, according to my

calculation, were clear of the orchard of Graywater Park and close to

the fringe of trees beyond; I was taking note of the curious old

brickwork of the passage, when--

"Look out, sir!" cried Kennedy--and the light began dancing madly.

"Just under your feet! Now it's up the wall!--mind your hand, Dr.

Petrie!"

The lamp was turned, and, since it shone fully into my face,

temporarily blinded me.

"On the roof over your head, Barton!"--this from Nayland Smith. "What

can we kill it with?"

Now my sight was restored to me, and looking back along the passage,

I saw, clinging to an irregularity in the moldy wall, the most

gigantic scorpion I had ever set eyes upon! It was fully as large as

my open hand.

Kennedy and Nayland Smith were stealthily retracing their steps, the

former keeping the light directed upon the hideous insect, which now

began running about with that horrible, febrile activity characteristic

of the species. Suddenly came a sharp, staccato report.... Sir Lionel

had scored a hit with his Browning pistol.

In waves of sound, the report went booming along the passage. The lamp,

as I have said, was turned in order to shine back upon us, rendering

the tunnel ahead a mere black mouth--a veritable inferno, held by

inhuman guards. Into that black cavern I stared, gloomily fascinated

by the onward rolling sound storm; into that blackness I looked ...

to feel my scalp tingle horrifically, to know the crowning horror of

the horrible journey.

The blackness was spangled with watching, diamond eyes!--with tiny

insect eyes that moved; upon the floor, upon the walls, upon the

ceiling! A choking cry rose to my lips.

"Smith! Barton! for God's sake, look! The place is \_alive\_ with

scorpions!"

Around we all came, panic plucking at our hearts, around swept the

beam of the big lamp; and there, retreating before the light, went a

veritable army of venomous creatures! I counted no fewer than three of

the giant red centipedes whose poisonous touch, called "the zayat kiss,"

is certain death; several species of scorpion were represented; and

some kind of bloated, unwieldy spider, so gross of body that its short,

hairy legs could scarce support it, crawled, hideous, almost at my feet.

What other monstrosities of the insect kingdom were included in that

obscene host I know not; my skin tingled from head to feet; I

experienced a sensation as if a million venomous things already clung

to me--unclean things bred in the malarial jungles of Burma, in the

corpse-tainted mud of China's rivers, in the fever spots of that

darkest East from which Fu-Manchu recruited his shadow army.

I was perilously near to losing my nerve when the crisp, incisive

tones of Nayland Smith's voice came to stimulate me like a cold douche.

"This wanton sacrifice of horrors speaks eloquently of a forlorn hope!

Sweep the walls with light, Kennedy; all those filthy things are

nocturnal and they will retreat before us as we advance."

His words proved true. Occasioning a sort of \_rustling\_ sound--a faint

sibilance indescribably loathsome--the creatures gray and black and

red darted off along the passage. One by one, as we proceeded, they

crept into holes and crevices of the ancient walls, sometimes singly,

sometimes in pairs--the pairs locked together in deadly embrace.

"They cannot live long in this cold atmosphere," cried Smith. "Many of

them will kill one another--and we can safely leave the rest to the

British climate. But see that none of them drops upon you in passing."

Thus we pursued our nightmare march, on through that valley of horror.

Colder grew the atmosphere and colder. Again the thunder boomed out

above us, seeming to shake the roof of the tunnel fiercely, as with

Titan hands. A sound of falling water, audible for some time, now

grew so loud that conversation became difficult. All the insects had

disappeared.

"We are approaching the River Starn!" roared Sir Lionel. "Note the dip

of the passage and the wet walls!"

"Note the type of brickwork!" shouted Smith.

Largely as a sedative to the feverish excitement which consumed me, I

forced myself to study the construction of the tunnel; and I became

aware of an astonishing circumstance. Partly the walls were natural,

a narrow cavern traversing the bed of rock which upcropped on this

portion of the estate, but partly, if my scanty knowledge of

archaeology did not betray me, they were \_Phoenician!\_

"This stretch of passage," came another roar from Sir Lionel, "dates

back to Roman days or even earlier! By God! It's almost incredible!"

And now Smith and Kennedy, who lid, were up to their knees in a

running tide. An icy shower-bath drenched us from above; ahead was a

solid wall of falling water. Again, and louder, nearer, boomed and

rattled the thunder; its mighty voice was almost lost in the roar of

that subterranean cataract. Nayland Smith, using his hands as a

megaphone, cried;--

"Failing the evidence that others have passed this way, I should not

dare to risk it! But the river is less than forty feet wide at the

point below Monkswell; a dozen paces should see us through the worst!"

I attempted no reply. I will frankly admit that the prospect appalled

me. But, bracing himself up as one does preparatory to a high dive,

Smith, nodding to Kennedy to proceed, plunged into the cataract ahead....

CHAPTER XL

THE BLACK CHAPEL

Of how we achieved that twelve or fifteen yards below the rocky bed of

the stream the Powers that lent us strength and fortitude alone hold

record. Gasping for breath, drenched, almost reconciled to the end

which I thought was come--I found myself standing at the foot of a

steep flight of stairs roughly hewn in the living rock.

Beside me, the extinguished lamp still grasped in his hand, leant

Kennedy, panting wildly and clutching at the uneven wall. Sir Lionel

Barton had sunk exhausted upon the bottom step, and Nayland Smith was

standing near him, looking up the stairs. From an arched doorway at

their head light streamed forth!

Immediately behind me, in the dark place where the waters roared,

opened a fissure in the rock, and into it poured the miniature

cataract; I understood now the phenomenon of minor whirlpools for

which the little river above was famous. Such were my impressions of

that brief breathing-space; then--

"Have your pistols ready!" cried Smith. "Leave the lamp, Kennedy. It

can serve us no further."

Mustering all the reserve that remained to us, we went, pell-mell, a

wild, bedraggled company, up that ancient stair and poured into the

room above....

One glance showed us that this was indeed the chapel of Asmodeus, the

shrine of Satan where the Black Mass had been sung in the Middle Ages.

The stone altar remained, together with certain Latin inscriptions cut

in the wall. Fu-Manchu's last home in England had been within a temple

of his only Master.

Save for nondescript litter, evidencing a hasty departure of the

occupants, and a ship's lantern burning upon the altar, the chapel was

unfurnished. Nothing menaced us, but the thunder hollowly crashed far

above. To cover his retreat, Fu-Manchu had relied upon the noxious

host in the passage and upon the wall of water. Silent, motionless, we

four stood looking down at that which lay upon the floor of the unholy

place.

In a pool of blood was stretched the Eurasian girl, Zarmi. Her

picturesque finery was reft into tatters and her bare throat and arms

were covered with weals and bruises occasioned by ruthless, clutching

fingers. Of her face, which had been notable for a sort of devilish

beauty, I cannot write; it was the awful face of one who had did from

strangulation.

Beside her, with a Malay \_krîs\_ in his heart--a little, jeweled weapon

that I had often seen in Zarmi's hand--sprawled the obese Greek,

Samarkan, a member of the Si-Fan group and sometime manager of a great

London hotel!

It was ghastly, it was infinitely horrible, that tragedy of which the

story can never be known, never be written; that fiendish fight to the

death in the black chapel of Asmodeus.

"We are too late!" said Nayland Smith. "The stair behind the altar!"

He snatched up the lantern. Directly behind the stone altar was a

narrow, pointed doorway. From the depths with which it communicated

proceeded vague, awesome sounds, as of waves breaking in some vast

cavern....

We were more than half-way down the stair when, above the muffled

roaring of the thunder, I distinctly heard the voice of \_Dr. Fu-Manchu!\_

"My God!" shouted Smith, "perhaps they are trapped! The cave is only

navigable at low tide and in calm weather!"

We literally fell down the remaining steps ... and were almost

precipitated into the water!

The light of the lantern showed a lofty cavern tapering away to a

point at its remote end, pear-fashion. The throbbing of an engine

and churning of a screw became audible. There was a faint smell of

petrol.

"Shoot! shoot!"--the frenzied voice was that of Sir Lionel--"Look!

they can just get through! ..."

\_Crack! Crack! Crack!\_

Nayland Smith's Browning spat death across the cave. Then followed the

report of Barton's pistol; then those of mine and Kennedy's.

A small motor-boat was creeping cautiously out under a low, natural

archway which evidently gave access to the sea! Since the tide was

incoming, a few minutes more of delay had rendered the passage of the

cavern impossible....

The boat disappeared.

"We are not beaten!" snapped Nayland Smith. "The \_Chanak-Kampo\_ will

be seized in the Channel!"

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

"There were formerly steps, in the side of the well from which this

place takes its name," declared Nayland Smith dully. "This was the

means of access to the secret chapel employed by the devil-worshipers."

"The top of the well (alleged to be the deepest in England)," said

Sir Lionel, "is among a tangle of weeds close by the ruined tower."

Smith, ascending three stone steps, swung the lantern out over the

yawning pit below; then he stared long and fixedly upwards.

Both thunder and rain had ceased; but even in those gloomy depths we

could hear the coming of the tempest which followed upon that

memorable storm.

"The steps are here," reported Smith; "but without the aid of a rope

from above, I doubt if they are climbable."

"It's that or the way we came, sir!" said Kennedy. "I was five years

at sea in wind-jammers. Let me swarm up and go for a rope to the Park."

"Can you do it?" demanded Smith. "Come and look!"

Kennedy craned from the opening, staring upward and downward; then--

"I can do it, sir," he said quietly.

Removing his boots and socks, he swung himself out from the opening

into the well and was gone.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The story of Fu-Manchu, and of the organization called the Si-Fan which

he employed as a means to further his own vast projects, is almost told.

Kennedy accomplished the perilous climb to the lip of the well, and

sped barefooted to Graywater Park for ropes. By means of these we all

escaped from the strange chapel of the devil-worshipers. Of how we

arranged for the removal of the bodies which lay in the place I need

not write. My record advances twenty-four hours.

The great storm which burst over England in the never-to-be-forgotten

spring when Fu-Manchu fled our shores has become historical. There

were no fewer than twenty shipwrecks during the day and night that it

raged.

Imprisoned by the elements in Graywater Park, we listened to the wind

howling with the voice of a million demons around the ancient manor,

to the creatures of Sir Lionel's collection swelling the unholy

discord. Then came the news that there was a big steamer on the Pinion

Rocks--that the lifeboat could not reach her.

As though it were but yesterday I can see us, Sir Lionel Barton,

Nayland Smith and I, hurrying down into the little cove which

sheltered the fishing-village; fighting our way against the power of

the tempest....

Thrice we saw the rockets split the inky curtain of the storm; thrice

saw the gallant lifeboat crew essay to put their frail craft out to

sea ... thrice the mighty rollers hurled them contemptuously back....

Dawn--a gray, eerie dawn--was creeping ghostly over the iron-bound

shore, when the fragments of wreckage began to drift in. Such are the

currents upon those coasts that bodies are rarely recovered from

wrecks on the cruel Pinion Rocks.

In the dim light I bent over a battered and torn mass of timber--that

once had been the bow of a boat; and in letters of black and gold I

read: "S. Y. \_Chanak-Kampo."\_

\*\*\*END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HAND OF FU-MANCHU\*\*\*

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