TRAIL OF FU MANCHU

Sax Rohmer

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By

Sax Rohmer

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THE TRAIL OF FU MANCHU

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT FOG

"WHO'S THERE?"

P. C. Ireland raised his red lantern, staring with smarting eyes through moving wreaths of yellow mist. Visibility was nil. This was the great fog of 1934—the worst in memory.

No one replied—there was no sound.

The constable shook himself, and setting the lantern down at his feet, flapped his arms in an endeavour to restore circulation. This chilliness was not wholly physical. Something funny was going on—something he didn't like. He stood quite still again, listening.

Three times he had heard that sound resembling nothing so much as the hard breathing of some animal, quite close to him in the fog—some furtive thing that crept by stealthily. . . . And now, he heard it again.

"Who's there?" he challenged, snatching up the red lamp.

None answered. The sound ceased—if it had ever existed.

Traffic had been brought to a standstill some hours before; pedestrians there were none. King Fog held the city of London in bondage. The silence was appalling. P. C. Ireland felt as though he was enveloped in a wet blanket from head to feet.

"I'll go and have another look," he muttered.

He began to grope his way up a short, semicircular drive to the door of a house. He had no idea what danger threatened Professor Ambroso, but he knew that he would be in for a bad time from the inspector if any one entered or left the professor's house unchallenged. . . .

His foot struck the bottom of the three steps which led up to the door. Ireland mounted slowly; but not until his red lamp was almost touching the woodwork, could he detect the fact that the door was closed. He stood there awhile listening, but could hear nothing. He groped his way back to his post at the gate.

The police 'phone box was not fifty yards away; he would have welcomed any excuse to call up the station; to establish contact with another human being—to be where there was some light other than the dim red glow of his lantern, which, sometimes when he set it down, resembled, seen through the moving clouds of mist, the baleful eye of a monster glaring up at him.

He regained the gate and put the lantern down. He wondered when, if ever, he would be relieved. Discipline was all very well, but on occasions like this damned fog, when men who ought to have been in bed were turned out, a quiet smoke was the next best thing to a drink.

He groped under his oilskin cape for the packet, took out a cigarette and lighted it. He felt for the coping beside the gate and sat down. The fog appeared to be getting denser. Then in a flash he was on his feet again.

"*Who's there?*" he shouted.

Stooping, he snatched up the red lantern and began to grope his way towards the other end of the semicircular drive.

"I can see you!" he cried, slightly reassured by the sound of his own voice—"don't try any funny business with *me*!"

He bumped into the half-open gate, and pulled up, listening. Silence. He had retained his cigarette, and now he replaced it between his lips. It was the blasted fog, of course, that was getting on his nerves. He was beginning to imagine things. It wouldn't do at all. But he sincerely wished that Waterlow would come along to relieve him, knowing in his heart of hearts that Waterlow hadn't one chance in a thousand of finding the point.

"Stick there till you're relieved," had been the inspector's order.

"All-night job for me," Ireland murmured, sadly.

What was the matter with this old bloke, Ambroso? He leaned against the gate and reflected. It was something about a valuable statue that somebody wanted to pinch, or something. Ireland found it difficult to imagine why anyone should want to steal a statue. The silence was profound—uncanny. To one used to the bombilation of London, even in the suburbs, it seemed unnatural. He had more than half smoked his cigarette when—there it was again!

Heavy breathing and a vague shuffling sound.

Ireland dropped his cigarette and snatched up his lantern. He made a surprising spring in the direction of the sound.

"Come here, damn you!" he shouted. "What the hell's the game?"

And this time he had a glimpse of—something!

It rather shook him. It might have been a crouching man, or it might have been an animal. It was very dim, just touched by the outer glow of his lantern. But Ireland was no weakling. He made another surprising leap, one powerful hand outstretched. The queer shape sprang aside and was lost again in the fog.

"What the hell is it?" Ireland muttered.

Aware again of that unaccountable chill, he peered around him, holding the lantern up. He had lost his bearings. Where the devil was the house? He made a rapid calculation, turned about and began to walk slowly forward. He walked for some time in this manner, till his outstretched hand touched a railing. He had crossed to the verge of the Common.

He was on the wrong side of the road.

His back to the railings, he set out again. He estimated that he was half-way across, when:

"Help!" came a thin, muffled scream—the voice of a woman. "For God's sake help me!"

The cry came from right ahead. P. C. Ireland moved more rapidly, grinding his teeth together. He had not been wrong—there *was* something funny going on. It might be murder. And, his heart beating fast, and all his training urging "*hurry—hurry!*" he could only crawl along. By sheer good luck he bumped into the half-open gate of the semicircular drive.

Evidently that cry had come from the house.

He moved forward more confidently—he was familiar with the route. Presently, a dim light glowed through the wet blanket of the fog. The door was open.

Ireland stumbled up the steps and found himself in a large lobby, brightly lighted. Fog streamed in behind him like the fetid breath of some monstrous dragon. There were pictures and statuettes; thick carpet on the floor; rugs and a wide staircase leading upwards. It was very warm. A coal fire had burned low in an open grate on one side of the lobby.

"Hello there!" he shouted. "I'm a police officer. Who called?"

There was no answer.

"Hi!" Ireland yelled at the top of his voice. "Is there anyone at home?"

He stood still, listening. A piece of coal dropped from the fire onto the tiled hearth. Ireland started. The house was silent—as silent as the fog-bound streets outside, and great waves of clammy mist were pouring in at the open door.

The constable put down his red lantern on a little coffee table, and began to look about him apprehensively. Then he walked to the foot of the stairs and trumpeted through cupped hands:

"Is there anyone there?"

Silence.

He was uncertain of his duty. Furthermore, this brightly lighted but apparently empty house was even more perturbing than the silence of the Common. A telephone stood on a ledge, not a yard from the coffee table. Ireland took up the instrument.

A momentary pause, during which he kept glancing apprehensively about him, and then:

"Wandsworth police station—urgent!" he said. "Police calling."

CHAPTER 2

THE PORCELAIN VENUS

THAT PHENOMENAL FOG which over a great part of Europe heralded and ushered in the New Year, was responsible for many things that were strange and many that were horrible. Amongst the latter the wreck of the Paris-Strasbourg express and the tragic crash of an Imperial Airways liner. The triumphant fog demon was responsible, also, for the present predicament of P. C. Ireland.

A big car belonging to the Flying Squad of Scotland Yard, and provided with special fog lights, stood outside Wandsworth police station. And in the divisional-inspector's office a conversation was taking place which, could P. C. Ireland have heard it, would have made that intelligent officer realize the importance of his solitary vigil.

Divisional-inspector Watford was a grey-haired, distinguished looking man of military bearing. He sat behind a large desk looking alternately from one to the other of his two visitors. Of these, one, Chief-inspector Gallaho, of the C.I.D., was well known to every officer in the Metropolitan police force. A thick-set, clean-shaven man, of florid colouring and truculent expression, buttoned up in a blue overcoat and wearing a rather wide-brimmed bowler hat. He stood, resting one elbow upon the mantelpiece and watching the man who had come with him from Scotland Yard.

The latter, tall, lean, and of that dully dark complexion which tells of long residence in the tropics, wore a leather overcoat over a very shabby tweed suit. He was hatless, and his close-cropped, crisply waving grey hair excited the envy of the district inspector. His own hair was of that colour but had been deserting him for many years. The man in the leather overcoat was smoking a pipe, and restlessly walking up and down the office floor.

The divisional inspector was somewhat awed by his second visitor, who was none other than ex-Assistant Commissioner Sir Denis Nayland Smith. Something very big was afoot. Suddenly pulling up in front of the desk, Sir Denis took his pipe from between his teeth, and:

"Did you ever hear of Dr. Fu Manchu?" he jerked, fixing his keen eyes upon Watford.

"Certainly, sir," said the latter, looking up in a startled way. "My predecessor in this division was actually concerned in the case, I believe, a number of years ago. For my own part"—he smiled slightly—"I have always regarded him as a sort of name—what you might term a trade-mark."

"Trade-mark?" echoed Nayland Smith. "What do you mean? That there's no such person?"

"Something of the kind, sir. I mean, isn't Fu Manchu really the name for a sort of political organization, like the Mafia—or the Black Hand?"

Nayland Smith laughed shortly, and glanced at the man from Scotland Yard.

"He is chief of such an organization," he replied, "but the organization itself has another name. There *is* a Dr. Fu Manchu—and Dr. Fu Manchu is in London. That's

why I'm here to-night."

The inspector stared hard for a moment, and then:

"Indeed, sir!" he murmured. "And may I take it that there's some connection between this Fu Manchu and Professor Ambroso?"

"I don't know," Nayland Smith snapped, "but I intend to find out to-night. What can you tell me about the professor? He lives in your area."

"He does, sir." The inspector nodded. "He has a large house and studio on the North Side of the Common. We have had orders for several days to afford him special protection."

Nayland Smith nodded, replacing his pipe between his teeth.

"Personally, I've never seen him, and I've never seen any of his work. He's a bit outside my province. But I understand that although he's an Italian by birth, he is a naturalized British subject. What he wants protection for, is beyond me. In fact, I should be glad to know, if anyone can tell me."

Sir Denis glanced at the Scotland Yard man.

"Bring the inspector up-to-date," he directed; "he's evidently rather in the dark."

Watford, resting his arms on the table, stared at the celebrated detective, enquiringly.

"Well, it's like this," Gallaho began in a low, rumbling voice. "If it means anything to you, I'll begin by admitting that it means nothing to me. Professor Ambroso has been abroad for some time supervising the making of a new kind of statue at the Sèvres works, outside Paris. It's a life-sized figure, I understand, and more or less life coloured. Since the matter was brought to my notice, I have been looking up newspaper reports and it appears that the thing has created a bit of a sensation in artistic circles. Well, the professor took it down to an international exhibition held in Nice. This exhibition closed a week ago, and the figure, which is called 'The Sleeping Venus,' was brought back to Paris, and from Paris to London."

"Did the professor come along, too?"

"Yes. And in Paris he asked for police protection."

"What for?"

"Don't ask me—I'm asking you. The French sent a man down to Boulogne on the train in which the thing was transported—then we took over on this side. There's a man on duty outside his house now, isn't there?"

"Yes. And the fog's so dense it's impossible to relieve him."

Nayland Smith had begun to walk up and down again; but now:

"He can be relieved when the other car arrives," he jerked, glancing back over his shoulder. "I should have pushed straight on, but there is someone I am anxious to interrogate. I have arranged for him to be brought here."

That the speaker was in a state of high nervous tension, none could have failed to recognize. He was a man oppressed by the cloud of some dreadful doubt.

"That's the story," Gallaho added. "The professor and his statue arrived by the Golden Arrow on Friday evening, just as the fog was beginning. He had two assistants,

or workmen—foreigners, anyway, with him—and he had hired a small lorry. A plain clothes man covered the proceedings, and the case containing the statue arrived at the professor's house about nine o'clock on Friday night, I understand." Then, unconsciously he echoed the ideas of Police Constable Ireland. "What the devil anybody wants to steal a statue for, is beyond me."

"It's so far beyond me," Nayland Smith said rapidly, "that I am here to-night to inspect that work of art."

Watford's expression was pathetically blank.

"It doesn't seem to mean anything," he confessed.

"No," said Gallaho, grimly, "it doesn't. It will seem to mean less when I tell you that we had a wire from the Italian police this evening—advising us that Professor Ambroso had been seen in the garden of his villa in Capri yesterday morning."

"What?"

"Sort that out," growled Gallaho. "It looks as though we've been giving protection to the wrong man, doesn't it?"

"Good Lord!" Watford's face registered the blankest bewilderment. "Is it your idea, sir——?" he turned to Nayland Smith—"I mean, you don't think that Professor Ambroso——"

"Well," growled Gallaho—"go ahead."

"No, of course, if he's been seen alive! Good Lord!" But again he turned to Sir Denis, who was pacing more and more rapidly up and down the floor. "Where does Fu Manchu come in?"

"That's a long story," Smith replied, "and until I have interviewed the professor, or the person posing as the professor, I cannot be certain that he comes in at all."

There was a rap on the door, and a uniformed constable came in.

"The other car has arrived, sir," he reported to Watford, "and there's a Mr. Preston here, asking for Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

"Show him in," said Watford.

A few moments later a young man came into the office bringing with him a whiff of the fog outside. He wore a heavy tweed overcoat and white muffler, and carried a soft hat. He had a fresh-coloured face and light blue, twinkling eyes—very humorous and good-natured. He sneezed several times, and smiled apologetically.

"My name is Nayland Smith," said Sir Denis. "Won't you please sit down?"

"Thank you, sir," and Preston sat down. "It's a devil of a night to bring a bloke out, but I've no doubt it's very important."

"It is," Nayland Smith snapped. "I will detain you no longer than possible."

Gallaho turned in his slow fashion and fixed his observant eyes upon the newcomer. Divisional-inspector Watford watched Nayland Smith.

"I understand that you were on duty," the latter continued, "at Victoria on Friday when the Paris-London service known as the Golden Arrow, arrived?"

"I was, sir."

"It is customary on this service to inspect baggage at Victoria?"

"It is."

"One of the passengers was Professor Pietro Ambroso, accompanied by two servants or workmen, and having with him a large case or crate containing a statue. Did you open this case?"

"I did." Preston's merry eyes twinkled. He sneezed, blew his nose and smiled apologetically. "There was a detective on special duty who had travelled across with the professor, and who seemed anxious to get the job over. He suggested that examination was unnecessary. But—" he grinned—"I wanted to peep at the statue. The professor was inclined to be peevish, but——"

"Describe the professor," snapped Nayland Smith.

Preston stared in surprise for a moment, and then:

"He's a tall old man, very stooped, with a white beard and moustache. Wears pince-nez, a funny black, continental cape coat, and a wide-brimmed black hat. He speaks with a slight Italian accent, and he's very frightening."

"Admirable thumb-nail sketch," Nayland Smith commented, his penetrating stare fixed almost feverishly upon the speaker. "Thank God for a man who can see straight. Do you remember the colour of his eyes?"

Preston shook his head, suppressing a sneeze.

"He seemed to be half blind. He peered, keeping his eyes nearly closed."

"Good. Go on. Statue."

Preston released the pent-up sneeze. Then, grinning in his cheerful way:

"It was the devil of a game getting the lid off," he went on. "But I roped off a corner to keep the curious away, and had the thing opened. Whew!" he whistled. "I got a shock. The figure was packed in on a sort of rest—and there was a second glass lid. I had the shock of my life!"

"Why?" growled Gallaho.

"Well, I'd read about the 'Sleeping Venus' in the papers. But I wasn't quite prepared for what I saw. Really—it's uncanny, and if I may say so, a bit shocking."

"In what way?" jerked Nayland Smith.

"Well, it's the figure of a beautiful girl, asleep. It isn't shiny, as I expected, hearing that it was made of porcelain—it looks just like a living woman. And it's coloured, to represent nature. I mean, finger nails and toe-nails and everything. By gosh!"

"Sounds worth seeing," growled Gallaho.

Nayland Smith dived into some capacious pocket within the leather overcoat, and produced a large mounted photograph. He set it upright on the inspector's desk, right under the lamp. Preston stood up and Gallaho approached the table. Wisps of fog floated about the room, competing for supremacy with the tobacco smoke from Nayland Smith's briar. The photograph was that of a nude statue, such as Preston had described; an exquisite figure relaxed, as if in sleep.

"Do you recognize it?" jerked Nayland Smith.

Preston bent forward, peering closely.

“Yes,” he said, “that’s her—I mean, that’s it. At least, I think so.” He peered closer yet. “Damn it! I’m not so sure.”

“What difference do you notice?” Nayland Smith asked, eagerly.

“Well . . .” Preston hesitated. “I suppose it was the colouring that did it. But the statue was far more beautiful than this photograph.”

There came a rap on the door, and the uniformed constable came in.

“The third car has arrived, sir,” he reported to Watford, “and a Mr. Alan Sterling is here.”

CHAPTER 3

STERLING'S STORY

ALAN STERLING burst into the room. He was a lean young man, marked by an intense virility. His features were too irregular for him to be termed handsome, but he had steadfast Scottish eyes, and one would have said that tenacity of purpose was his chief virtue. His skin was very tanned, and one might have mistaken him for a young Army officer. His topcoat flying open revealing a much-worn flannel suit, and, a soft hat held in his hand, he was a man wrought-up to the verge of endurance. His haggard eyes turned from face to face. Then he saw Sir Denis, and sprang forward:

"Sir Denis!" he said, "Sir Denis——" and despite his Scottish name, a keen observer might have deduced from his intonation that Sterling was a citizen of the United States. "For God's sake, tell me you have some news? Something—anything! I'm going mad!"

Nayland Smith grasped Sterling's hand, and put his left arm around his shoulders.

"I am glad you're here," he said, quietly. "There is news, of a sort."

"Thank God!"

"Its value remains to be tested."

"You think she's alive? You don't think——?"

"I am *sure* she's alive, Sterling."

The other three men in the room watched silently, and sympathetically. Gallaho, alone, seemed to comprehend the inner significance of Sterling's wild words.

"I must leave you for a moment," Nayland Smith went on. "This is Divisional-inspector Watford, and Chief Detective-inspector Gallaho, of Scotland Yard. Give them any information in your possession. I shall not be many minutes." He turned to Preston. "If you will give me five minutes' conversation before you go," he said, "I shall be indebted."

He went out with Preston. Sterling dropped into the chair which the latter had vacated, and ran his fingers through his disordered hair, looking from Gallaho to Watford.

"You must think I am mad," he apologized. "But I've been through hell—just real hell!"

Gallaho nodded, slowly.

"I know something about it, sir," he said, "and I can sympathize."

"But you don't know Fu Manchu!" Sterling replied, wildly. "He's a fiend—a demon—he bears a charmed life."

"He must," said Watford, watching the speaker. "It's a good many years since he first came on the books, sir, and if as I understand he's still going strong—he must be a bit of a superman."

"He's the Devil's agent on earth," said Sterling, bitterly. "I would give ten years of my life and any happiness that may be in store for me, to see that man dead!"

The door opened, and Nayland Smith came in.

"Give me the details quickly, Sterling," he directed. "Action is what you want—and action is what I'm going to offer you."

"Good enough, Sir Denis." Sterling nodded. He was twisting his soft hat between his hands. It became apparent from moment to moment, how dangerously overwrought he was. "Really—there's absolutely nothing to tell you."

"I disagree," said Nayland Smith, quietly. "Odd facts pop up, if one reviews what seemed at the time to be meaningless. We have two very experienced police officers here and since they are now concerned in the case, I should be indebted if you would outline the facts of your unhappy experience."

"Good enough. From the time you saw me off in Paris?"

"Yes." Nayland Smith glanced at Watford and Gallaho. "Mr. Sterling," he explained, "is engaged to the daughter of an old mutual friend, Dr. Petrie. Fleurette—that is her name—spent a great part of her life in the household of that Dr. Fu Manchu, whom you, Inspector Watford, seem disposed to regard as a myth."

"Funny business in the south of France, some months ago," Gallaho growled. "The French press hushed it up, but we've got all the dope at the Yard."

"Sir Denis and I," Sterling continued, "went to Paris with Dr. Petrie and his daughter, my fiancée. They were returning to Egypt—Dr. Petrie's home is in Cairo. Sir Denis was compelled to hurry back to London, but I went on to Marseilles and saw them off in the *Oxfordshire* of the Bibby Line."

"I only have the barest outline of the facts, sir," Gallaho interrupted. "But may I ask if you went on board?"

"I was one of the last visitors to leave."

"Then I take it, sir, you waved to the young lady as the ship was pulling out?"

"No," Sterling replied, "I didn't, as a matter of fact, Inspector. I left her in the cabin. She was very disturbed."

"I quite understand."

"Dr. Petrie was on the promenade deck as the ship pulled out, but Fleurette, I suppose, was in her cabin."

"The point I was trying to get at, sir, was this," Gallaho persisted, doggedly, whilst Nayland Smith, an appreciative look in his grey eyes, watched him. "How long elapsed between your saying good-bye to the young lady in her cabin, and the time the ship pulled out?"

"Not more than five minutes. I talked to the doctor—her father—on deck, and actually left at the last moment."

"Fleurette asked you to leave her?" jerked Nayland Smith.

"Yes. She was terribly keyed-up. She thought it would be easier if we said good-bye in the cabin. I rejoined her father on deck, and——"

"One moment, sir," Gallaho's growling voice interrupted again. "Which side of the deck were you on? The seaward side, or the land side?"

"The seaward side."

"Then you have no idea who went ashore in the course of the next five minutes?"

"No. I am afraid I haven't."

"That's all right, sir. Go ahead."

"I watched the *Oxfordshire* leave," Sterling went on, "hoping that Fleurette would appear; but she didn't. Then I went back to the hotel, had some lunch, and picked up the Riviera Express in the afternoon, returning to Paris. I was hoping for a message at the Hotel Meurice but there was none."

"Did Petrie know you were staying at the Meurice?" jerked Nayland Smith.

"No, but Fleurette did."

"Where did you stay on the way out?"

"At the Chatham—a favourite pub of Petrie's."

"Quite. Go on."

"I dined, and spent the evening with some friends who lived in Paris, and when I returned to my hotel, there was still no message. I left for London this morning, or rather—since it's well after midnight—yesterday morning. A radio message was waiting for me at Boulogne. It had been despatched on the previous evening. It was from Petrie on the *Oxfordshire* . . ." Sterling paused, running his fingers through his hair. . . . "It just told me that Fleurette was not on board; urged me to get in touch with you, Sir Denis, and finally said the doctor was hoping to be transferred to an incoming ship."

"A chapter of misadventures," Nayland Smith murmured. "You see, we were both inaccessible, temporarily. I have later news, however. Petrie has effected the transference. He has been put on to a Dutch liner, due into Marseilles to-night."

The telephone bell rang. Inspector Watford took up the instrument on his table and:

"Yes," he said, listened for a moment, and then: "Put him through to me here."

He glanced at Nayland Smith.

"The constable on duty outside Professor Ambroso's house," he reported, a note of excitement discernible in his voice.

Some more moments of silence followed during which all watched the man at the desk. Smith smoked furiously. Sterling, haggard under his tan, glanced from face to face almost feverishly. Chief Dectective-inspector Gallaho removed his bowler, which fitted very tightly, and replaced it at a slightly different angle. Then:

"Hello, yes—officer in charge speaking. What's that? . . ." The vague percussion of a distant voice manifested itself. "You say you are *in* the house? Hold on a moment."

The inspector looked up, his eyes alight with excitement.

"The officer on duty heard a cry for help," he explained; "found his way through the fog to the house; the door was open, and he is now in the lobby. The house is deserted, he reports."

"We are too late!" It was Nayland Smith's voice. "He has tricked me again! Tell your man to stand by, Inspector. Gather up all the men available and pack them into the second car. Come on, Gallaho. Sterling, you join us!"

CHAPTER 4

PIETRO AMBROSO'S STUDIO

EVEN THE POWERFUL SEARCHLIGHTS attached to the Flying Squad car failed to penetrate that phenomenal fog for more than a few yards. Progress was slow. To any vehicle not so equipped it would have been impossible. A constable familiar with the districts walked ahead, carrying a red lantern. A powerful beam from the leading car was directed upon this lantern, and so the journey went on.

P. C. Ireland in the lobby of Professor Ambroso's house learned the lesson that silence and solitude can be more terrifying than the wildest riot. His instructions had been to close the door but to remain in the lobby. This he had done.

When he found himself alone in that house of mystery, the strangest promptings assailed his brain. He was not an imaginative man, but sheer common-sense told him that something uncommonly horrible had taken place in the house of Professor Ambroso that night.

The fire was burning low in the grate. There were some wooden logs in an iron basket, and Ireland tossed two on the embers without quite knowing why he took that liberty. Red tape bound him. Furtively he watched the stairs which disappeared in shadows, above. He was a man of action; his instinct prompted him to explore this silent house. He had no authority to do so. His mere presence in the lobby—since he could not swear that the cry actually had come from the house—was a transgression. But in this, at least, he was covered; the divisional inspector had told him to stay there. How did they hope to reach him, he argued. They would probably get lost on the way.

Now that the fog was shut out, he began to miss it. The silence which seemed to speak and in which there were strange shapes, had been awful, out there, on the verge of the Common, but the silence of this lighted lobby was even more oppressive.

Always he watched the stair.

Mystery brooded on the dim landing, but no sound broke the stillness. He began to study his immediate surroundings. There were some very strange statuettes in the lobby—queer busts, and oddly distorted figures. The paintings, too, were of a sort to which he was unused. The entire appointments of the place came within the category which P. C. Ireland mentally condemned under the heading of "Chelsea".

One of the logs which he had placed upon the fire, and which had just begun to ignite, fell into the hearth. He started, as though a shot had been fired.

"Damn!" he muttered, "this place is properly getting on my nerves."

He rescued the log and tossed it back into place. A cigarette was indicated. He could get rid of it very quickly, if the inspector turned up in person, which he doubted. He discarded his oilskin cape, and produced a little yellow packet, selecting and lighting a cigarette almost lovingly. There was company in a cigarette when a man felt lonely and queer. Always, he watched the stair.

He had finished his cigarette and reluctantly tossed the stub into the fire which now was burning merrily, when the sharp note of a bell brought him to his feet at a bound. It

was the door bell. P. C. Ireland ran forward and threw the door open.

A man in a leather overcoat, a grey-haired man, with piercing steely-blue eyes, stood staring at him.

"Constable Ireland?" he rapped.

There was unmistakable authority about the new arrival, and:

"Yes, sir," Ireland replied.

Nayland Smith walked into the lobby, followed by Inspector Gallaho, a figure familiar to every officer in the force. There was a third man, a young, very haggard looking man. But Ireland barely noticed him. The presence of Gallaho told him that in some way which might prove to be profitable to himself, he had become involved in a case of major importance. Fog swept into the lobby. He stood to attention, recognizing several familiar faces, of brother constables, peering in out of the darkness.

"You heard a cry for help?" Nayland Smith went on. His mode of speech reminded the constable of a distant machine gun. "You were then at the gate, I take it?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?" growled Gallaho.

"There was someone moving about in the fog, sir. When I challenged him, he didn't answer—he just disappeared. At last, I got a glimpse of him, or it, or whatever it was."

"What do you mean by 'it'?" Gallaho demanded. "If you saw something—you can describe it."

"Well, sir, it might have been a man crouching down on his hands and knees—you know what the fog is like——"

"You mean," said Nayland Smith, "that you endeavoured to capture this thing—or person—who declined to answer your challenge?"

"Thank you, sir; yes, that's what I mean."

"Did you touch him or it?" Gallaho demanded.

"No, sir. But I lost my bearings trying to grab him. I found myself nearly on the other side of the road by the Common, when I heard the cry."

"Describe this cry," snapped Nayland Smith.

"It was a woman's voice, sir; very dim through the fog. And the words were 'Help! For God's sake help me!' I thought it came from this house. I groped my way back, and when I reached the door, found it open. I've been here in the lobby, ever since."

"You say it was a woman's voice," Sterling broke in. "Did it sound like a young woman or an old woman?"

"Judging from what I could make out through the fog, sir, I should say, a young woman."

Sterling clutched his hair distractedly. He felt that madness was not far off.

Gallaho turned to Sir Denis.

"It's up to you, sir. Do you want the house searched? According to regulations, we are not entitled to do it."

His tone was ironical.

“Search it from cellar to attic,” snapped Nayland Smith. “Post a man at each end of the drive and split the others up.”

“Good enough, sir.” Gallaho returned to the open doorway. “How many of you have got lanterns—torches are no good in this blasted fog.”

“Two,” came a muffled voice, “and Ireland has a third.”

“The two men with lanterns are to stand at the ends of the drive. Anybody coming out—get him. Jump to it. The rest of you, come in.”

Four constables came crowding into the lobby.

“Isn’t there a garage?” snapped Nayland Smith.

“Yes, sir,” Ireland replied. “It opens on to the left side of the drive-in. But nothing has gone out of it to-night.”

“Have you any idea where the studio is?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve been on day duty here. It’s behind the garage—but probably, there’s a way through from the house.”

“Join me, Sterling,” said Nayland Smith. “Gallaho, allot a man to each of the four floors. Close the door again, and post a man in charge here, in the lobby.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Come with me, Ireland. You say the studio lies in this direction?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Come on, Sterling.”

They crossed the lobby, approaching a door on the left of the ascending staircase. Chief Detective-inspector Gallaho was readjusting his bowler. Police constables were noisily clattering upstairs, their torches flashing as they ran. The door proved to open on to a narrow corridor.

“Find the switch,” snapped Nayland Smith.

Ireland found it. And in the new illumination, queer paintings assailed their senses from the walls. There was a door at the further end of the passage. They opened it and found themselves in some dark, lofty place.

“There’s a switch, somewhere,” Nayland Smith muttered.

“I’ve found it, sir.”

The studio of Pietro Ambroso became illuminated.

To one not familiar with the Modern Art movement it must have resembled a nightmare. Those familiar with the phases of the celebrated sculptor could have explained that his mode of expression, which, for a time—indeed, for many years—had conformed to the school with which the name of Epstein is associated, had, latterly, swung back to the early Greek tradition—the photographic simplicity of Praxiteles. All sorts of figures and groups surrounded the investigators. That deplorable untidiness which seems to be inseparable from genius characterised the studio.

There were one or two earlier examples of ceramic experiments—strange figures in porcelain resembling primitive goddesses. But Nayland Smith’s entire attention was focussed upon a long, narrow box, very stoutly built, which lay upon the floor. In form, it bore an unpleasant resemblance to a coffin. Its lid was propped against the wall near

by, and a sheet of plate glass, obviously designed to fit inside the crate, lay upon the floor. Quantities of cotton wool were scattered about. Nayland Smith bent and peered at the receptacle.

"This is the thing described by Preston," he said. "Look——" he pointed. "There are the rests which he mentioned—not unlike those used in ancient Egypt for the repose of the mummy."

He stared all around the studio.

"I know what you're thinking, Sir Denis," said Sterling, hoarsely.

"Where is the porcelain Venus?"

There was a momentary silence, and then:

"That Customs officer," came Gallaho's growling voice—he had just come in —"didn't seem to be quite sure that what he saw *was* the porcelain Venus."

"I quite agree, Inspector," said Nayland Smith.

His manner, his voice, indicated intense nervous tension. From an inner pocket he extracted a leather case, and from the leather case, a lens. He bent, peering down into the crate designed to contain the celebrated work of art.

Gallaho watched him silently, respectfully. Sterling, fists clenched, knew that sanity itself depended upon what Nayland Smith should find. Sir Denis completed his examination of the box and then turned his attention to the wooden rests designed to support the figure. This quest, also, seemed to yield no result. Dim voices sounded about the house. The search party was busy. Demon Fog had penetrated to the studio. He could be seen moving in sinister coils about the electric lights. Finally, Sir Denis addressed himself to the cotton-wool packing, and suddenly:

"Ah!" he cried. "By God! I was right. Sterling! I was right. . . ."

"What, Sir Denis? For heaven's sake, tell me, what is it you have found?"

Nayland Smith moved to a bench littered with fragments of plaster, wire frames and other odds and ends, and laid something tenderly down immediately under an overhanging light.

"A wavy, Titian red hair," he said, in a low voice. "Study it closely, Sterling. You know the colour and texture of Fleurette's hair better than I do."

"Sir Denis . . ."

Sterling was electrified.

"Don't despair, Sterling. I suggest that the beautiful figure which Preston saw in his crate, was not constructed at the Sèvres factory to the design of Professor Ambroso, but was . . . Fleurette."

CHAPTER 5

P. C. IRELAND IS UNEASY

"THIS BLASTED FOG is blotting everything out again," said Nayland Smith irritably: "already I can't see the river. By dusk it will be as bad as ever."

He turned from the window and stared across the room in the direction of a leather couch upon which his visitor was extended. Alan Sterling, his keen, tanned face very haggard, summoned up a smile.

A log fire burned in the open hearth. Red leather was the predominant note in the furniture, and there were some fine, strong oil paintings on the wall. The big lofty room was under-furnished, but homely and habitable. One might have supposed its appointments to have been dictated by somebody long resident in the East, and therefore used to scanty furniture. Some of the paintings were of Eastern subjects, and there was some good jade on top of a bookcase which seemed to be filled with works of a medico-legal character, with a sprinkling of Orientalism.

"You know, Sir Denis," said Alan Sterling, sitting upright, "you are like a tonic to me. I am keen enough about my own job, which happens to be botany; but if I may say so, for an ex-Assistant Commissioner of Metropolitan Police to select a residence right in Whitehall—next door, as it were, to Scotland Yard—indicates an even greater keenness."

Nayland Smith glanced swiftly at the speaker. He knew the tension under which Sterling was labouring; how good it was to distract his mind from those torturing queries:—Where is she? Is she alive, or dead?

"You are quite right," he replied, quietly. "I have been through the sort of fires which are burning you now Sterling, and I have always found that work was the best ointment for the burns. It was fate, I suppose, that made me an officer of Indian police. The gods—whoever the gods may be—had selected me as an opponent for——"

"Dr. Fu Manchu," said Sterling.

He brushed his hair back from his forehead: it was a gesture of distraction, almost of despair. Nayland Smith crossed to the buffet and from a tobacco jar which stood there, began to load his briar.

"Dr. Fu Manchu. Yes. I know I have failed, Sterling, because the man still lives. But *he* has failed, too; because, thank God I have succeeded in checking him, step by step."

"I know you have, Sir Denis. No other man in the world could have done what you have done."

"That's open to question." Nayland Smith stuffed broad-cut mixture into the cracked bowl; "but the point is that if I can't throw him—I can hold him." He struck a match. "He's here, Sterling. He's here, in London."

Alan Sterling clenched his fists and Nayland Smith watched him, as he lighted his pipe. Passivity threatened Sterling, that Eastern resignation with which Smith was all too familiar. It must be combated: he must revivify the man; awaken the fiery spirit which he had good reason to know burned in him.

"Let's review the facts," he went on, briskly, his pipe now well alight. He began to walk up and down the Persian carpet. "You will find, Sterling, that they are not as unfavourable as they seem. To arrange them in some sort of order: (*a*)"—he raised a lean forefinger—"Dr. Fu Manchu, hunted by the police of Europe, succeeds in reaching England disguised as Professor Ambroso. You and I know that he is an illusionist unrivalled since the death of the late Harry Houdini. Very well; (*b*)"—he raised his second finger—"Fleurette Petrie, incidentally, your fiancée, was smuggled off the *Oxfordshire* by means of some trick which we may never solve, and taken to Nice; (*c*)"—he raised the third finger—"doubtless in that state of trance which Dr. Fu Manchu is able to induce, she travelled from Nice to London as the 'Sleeping Venus' of Professor Ambroso, and duly arrived at the house on the North Side of the Common."

"She is dead," Sterling groaned. "They have killed her."

"I emphatically deny that she is dead," snapped Nayland Smith. "Definitely, she was not dead last night."

"What do you mean, Sir Denis?"

A pathetic light of hope had sprung into the haggard eyes of Sterling.

"A dead girl—foully murdered—her spirit silently appealing to a stolid London policeman."

"But the appeal was not silent. Ireland heard the cry for help."

"Exactly—therefore the girl was not dead."

Alan Sterling, his hands clutching his knees, watched the speaker as, of old, supplicants might have watched the Cumæan Oracle.

"It's an old move of the master schemer; I recognize it. Whilst he holds Fleurette, he holds the winning card. His own safety is bound up in hers. Don't you see that? Let us proceed to (*d*)." He held up his little finger: "Pietro Ambroso is either a dupe or an accomplice of Fu Manchu—it doesn't matter much one way or the other. But the desertion of his entire household is significant. We have the evidence of P. C. Ireland—an excellent officer—that no car approached or left the house prior to the time of our arrival. Consider this fact. It has extraordinary significance."

"I am trying to think," Sterling murmured.

"Keep on trying, and see if your thoughts run parallel with mine. Look at the blasted fog!"—he jerked his arm towards the window. "There's going to be another blanket to-night. Have you grasped what I mean?"

"Not entirely."

"They can't have taken her far, Sterling. Ireland and his opposite number have been on that point all night and all day."

"My God!" Sterling sprang up, his eyes shining. "You're right, Sir Denis. I see what you mean."

"Dr. Fu Manchu, for the second time in his career, is on the run. You don't know, Sterling, but I have clipped his wings pretty severely. I have cut him off from many of his associates. I am getting very near to the heart of the mystery. He is financially embarrassed. He's a hunted man. Fleurette is his last hope. Don't imagine for one

moment that she is dead. Dead—she would be useless; alive, she's a triumph for the doctor."

A muffled bell rang. Nayland Smith crossed to a side table and took up a telephone.

"Yes," he said; "put him through to me, please."

He turned around to Sterling.

"Police constable Waterlow," he said, "on duty outside Professor Ambroso's house. Hello!—yes?" He spoke into the mouthpiece. "Here . . ."

Police constable Waterlow proved to be speaking from a call-box somewhere in Brixton.

"After P. C. Ireland relieved me, sir, and I went off duty, I began thinking. I don't know if I should have reported it—my orders were a bit vague-like. But talking it over with the missis, I came to the conclusion that you ought to know, sir. Divisional-inspector Watford gave me permission to speak to you, and gave me your number."

"Carry on, Constable. I'm all attention."

"Well, sir, the inspector didn't seem to think there was anything in it. But he said that you might like to know. There was a funeral next door to Professor Ambroso's house this afternoon——"

"What!"

"From a ground-floor flat, sir, in the next house. I can't tell you much about it, because I don't know. But it was a Miss Demuras—has been living there for about a month, I understand. I never thought of mentioning it to Ireland when he took over from me, but my missis says, 'This is a murder case, and here's a funeral next door: ring up the inspector.' I did it, and he said he had instructions to put me straight through to you."

"Who was in charge of the funeral, Constable?"

Alan Sterling sprang to his feet; fists clenched, quivering, he stood watching Nayland Smith at the telephone.

"The London Necropolis Company, sir."

"At what time did it take place?"

"At four o'clock this afternoon."

"Were there any followers?"

"Only one, sir. A foreign gentleman."

"You don't know who was attending the patient?"

"Yes, sir; as it happens, I do. A Dr. Norton, who lives on South Side. He was my own doctor, sir, when I lived in Clapham."

"Thanks, Constable. I wish you had reported this earlier. But it's not your fault."

Nayland Smith turned to Sterling.

"Don't look like that," he pleaded. "It may mean nothing or it may be a red herring. But whilst I pick up one or two things that I want in the other room, get Gallaho at Scotland Yard, and ask him to join us here with a fast car."

CHAPTER 6

DR. NORTON'S PATIENT

Dr. Norton was surprised, somewhat annoyed and obviously perturbed by the invasion of Sir Denis Nayland Smith, Chief-inspector Gallaho and Alan Sterling. His consultations were finished, and he had hastily changed into evening kit. Clearly, he had a dinner appointment. He was a man approaching middle age, of sanguine complexion—West Country, as Nayland Smith recognized at a glance, and clever without being brilliant.

As his three visitors were shown into the upstairs study and made themselves known to Dr. Norton, Nayland Smith's behaviour was somewhat peculiar. Watched by the others, he walked around the room inspecting the bookcases, the pictures, and even the window, smiling in a manner that was almost sad.

"This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting you, Sir Denis," said Dr. Norton, "but we have a mutual friend."

"I know." Nayland Smith turned, and stared at him. "You bought this practice from Petrie."

"I've stuck it ever since, although it isn't particularly profitable."

Nayland Smith nodded and glanced at Gallaho. The celebrated detective-inspector, on this occasion, had removed his bowler, revealing a close-cropped head, and greying, dark hair.

"You must have observed, Inspector, during your great experience of human life, that things move in circles."

"I have often noticed it, sir."

"Many years have elapsed, and much history has been made since Dr. Fu Manchu first visited England. But it was in this very room——" he turned to Dr. Norton—"that the Mandarin Fu Manchu made his second attempt upon my life."

"What!"

Dr. Norton could not conceal his astonishment. "I know something, but very little, from Petrie, of the queer matters to which you refer, Sir Denis, but I hadn't recognized ——"

"You hadn't recognized the existence of the circle," snapped Nayland Smith. "No, I suppose we have to live many lives before we do. It's a law, but it always strikes me as odd when I come in contact with it. It was here, in this very room, that Petrie, from whom you bought this practice, came to an understanding with the beautiful woman who is now his wife. It was here that Dr. Fu Manchu endeavoured to remove me by means of the Zayat Kiss. Ah!——" he looked about him, and then pulled his pipe and his pouch from the pocket of his tweed jacket. "The circle narrows. I begin to hope again."

Dr. Norton's interest in his dinner engagement was evidently weakening. The magnetic personality of Nayland Smith was beginning to dominate.

“Of course, Sir Denis, one has heard of Fu Manchu. I haven’t seen Petrie since he settled in Cairo; but odd things crop up in the Press from time to time. Am I to understand that you gentlemen have called this evening with regard to this mythical monster?”

“That’s it,” said Gallaho; “the circle to which Sir Denis referred has roped you in now, Doctor.”

“I am afraid I don’t understand.”

“Naturally,” rapped Nayland Smith.

“May I suggest whiskies and soda,” said the physician. “It doesn’t run to cocktails.”

“It’s a suggestion,” Gallaho replied, “that doesn’t leave me unmoved.”

Dr. Norton dispensed drinks for his unexpected visitors, and then:

“My recognition of the fact,” said Nayland Smith, “that fate had brought me back to Petrie’s old quarters, with their many associations, rather took me off the track. The point of our visit is this, Doctor——” He fixed his penetrating eyes upon their host: “You have been attending a Miss Demuras, who lived on the North Side of the Common——”

“Yes.” Dr. Norton visibly started. “I regret to say that she died yesterday, and was buried to-day.”

“Without recourse to your case-book,” Nayland Smith went on, “what roughly were the symptoms which led to her end?”

Dr. Norton passed his hand over his face, and then brushed his fair moustache. He was considering his reply, but finally:

“It was a case of pernicious anaemia,” he replied. “Miss Demuras had resided in the tropics. She was practically alone in the world, except for a brother—with whom she requested me to communicate, and who appeared in time to take charge of the funeral arrangements.”

“Pernicious anaemia,” Nayland Smith murmured. “It’s a rather obscure thing, isn’t it, Doctor?”

“As it’s name implies, and I have used its popular name, it is—pernicious. It’s difficult to combat. She was in an advanced stage when I first attended her.”

“She occupied a ground-floor flat?”

“Yes.”

“Had she any personal servants?”

“No; it was a service flat.”

“I see. When did she actually die, doctor?”

“Just before dawn yesterday. A popular hour for death, Sir Denis.”

“I know. There was a nurse in attendance, of course.”

“Yes. A very experienced woman from the local Institute.”

“She called you, I take it, to the patient, fearing that she was in extremis?”

“Yes. It was a painful surprise. I hadn’t expected it . . .”

“Quite. But her sudden death was consistent with her symptoms?”

“Undoubtedly. It happens that way in certain cases.”

“Had you taken any other opinion?”

“Yes. I called in Havelock Wade only last week.”

Gallaho was following the conversation eagerly, his sullen-looking eyes turning from speaker to speaker. Sterling, sitting in an armchair, had abandoned hope of mastering his intense anxiety. He didn’t know, and couldn’t grasp, what this inquiry portended. But wholly, horribly, his mind was filled with the idea that Fleurette was dead and had been buried.

“Forgive me if I seem to pry into professional secrets,” Nayland Smith went on; “but would you mind describing your late patient?”

“Not at all,” Dr. Norton replied. He began again to brush his moustache. His expression, Nayland Smith decided, was that of an unhappy man. “She was, I think, a Eurasian. I don’t know very much of the East; I have never been there. But she was some kind of half-caste—there was Eastern blood in her. Her skin was of a curiously dull, ivory colour. I may as well say, Sir Denis, that she was a woman of great beauty. This uniform ivory hue of her skin was fascinating. To what extent this characteristic was due to heredity, and to what extent to her ailment, I never entirely determined. . . .”

CHAPTER 7

LASH MARKS

"I QUITE UNDERSTAND, Sir Denis," Dr. Norton said. "Please regard any information I can give you as yours. I venture to believe you are wrong in supposing that Miss Demuras was an associate of this group, to which you refer, but I am entirely at your disposal. I will admit here and now, that I was growing infatuated with my patient. Her death, which I had not anticipated, was a severe blow."

Nayland Smith walked up and down, tugging at the lobe of his ear, glancing at the titles of the books, staring about the room; then:

"I suggest that Miss Demuras's eyes were long, narrow, and very beautiful?"

"Very beautiful."

"Of a most unusual green colour, at times glittering like emeralds?"

"It occurs to me that you were acquainted with her?" said Dr. Norton, staring hard at the speaker.

"It occurs to me," Nayland Smith replied grimly, glancing at Alan Sterling, "that both Mr. Sterling and I from time to time have come in contact with Miss Demuras! Do you agree, Sterling?"

The young American botanist fixed a pathetically eager gaze upon the face of Nayland Smith; it was taut, grim, a fighting glint in deep-set eyes.

"My God! The net's closing in on us again!" he whispered. "You seem to have an extra sense, Sir Denis, where this man and his people are concerned. It's uncanny . . . but it may be a coincidence."

Inspector Gallaho had resumed his favourite pose. He was leaning on the mantelshelf, moving his thin-lipped mouth as if chewing phantom gum. He was out of his depth, but nothing in his expression revealed this fact.

"I suggest that Miss Demuras was tall, and very slender?" Nayland Smith continued. "She had exquisite hands, slender-fingered and indolent—patrician hands with long, narrow, almond nails, highly varnished?"

"You are right. I see you knew her."

"Her voice was very soothing—almost hypnotic?"

Dr. Norton started violently, and stood up.

"This is either clairvoyance," he declared, "or you knew her better than I knew her. The implication is that Demuras is not her name. Don't tell me that she was a criminal. . . ."

"There still remains a margin of doubt," said Nayland Smith, rapidly. He suddenly turned and stared at Sterling. "I have just recalled something that you told me—something that you witnessed in Ste. Claire de la Roche. . . . When the Chinese punish, they punish severely. There's just a chance."

He twisted about again, facing Dr. Norton. But the latter had construed the meaning of his words. His sanguine colour had ebbed; he was become pale.

"Ah!" cried Nayland Smith. "I see that you understand me!"

Norton nodded, and dropped back into his chair.

"There is no further room for doubt," he acknowledged. "Whoever my patient was, clearly you knew her. Throughout the time that I attended her, nearly two weeks, she definitely declined to permit me to make a detailed examination. By which I mean that she objected to exposing her shoulders. In this she was adamant. My curiosity was keenly aroused. She had no other physical reticences. Indeed, her mode of dress and her carriage, might almost be described as provocative. But she would never permit me to apply my stethoscope to her back. By means of a trick, as I frankly confess, and which need not be described, I succeeded in obtaining a glimpse of her bare shoulders. She was unaware of this. . . ."

He paused, looking from face to face. He was beginning to regain his naturally fresh colour. He was beginning to realize that his beautiful patient had not been what she seemed.

"There were great weals on her delicate skin—healed, but the scars were still visible. At some time, and not so long ago, she had been lashed—mercilessly lashed."

He clenched his fists, staring up at Nayland Smith.

The latter nodded, and resumed his restless promenade of the carpet; then:

"Do you understand, Sterling?" he snapped.

Sterling was up—his restlessness was feverish.

"I understand that Fah Lo Suee is dead—that she died alone, in that flat."

"Dead!"

"Sir Denis!" Dr. Norton stood up. "I have been frank with you: be equally frank with me. Who was this woman?"

"I don't know her real name," Nayland Smith replied, "but she is known as Fah Lo Suee. She is the daughter of Dr. Fu Manchu."

"*What!*"

"And it was he, her father, who in exercising his parental prerogative left the scars to which you refer."

"My God!" groaned Dr. Norton—"the fiend!—the merciless fiend! A delicate, tenderly nurtured woman!—and an ailing woman at that!"

"Possibly," snapped Nayland Smith. "Delicately nurtured—yes. I am anxious, doctor, to protect your professional reputation. Your certificate was given in good faith. There is no man on the Register who would not have done the same in the circumstances. Of this, I assure you. But——" he paused—"I must have a glimpse of the body of your late patient."

"Why?"

"I think it can be arranged, sir," growled Gallaho. "I put a few inquiries through this evening after Mr. Sterling 'phoned me at the Yard, and I found that the deceased lady has been buried in a family vault in the old part of the Catholic Cemetery."

"That is correct," Dr. Norton interrupted. "Her only surviving relative, a brother, Manoel Demuras, with whom she had requested the nurse to get into communication,

came from Lisbon, as I understand, and the somewhat hurried funeral was due to his time being limited."

"Can you describe this man?" snapped Nayland Smith.

"His ugliness was almost as noticeable as his sister's beauty. The yellow streak was very marked."

"You mean he might almost have passed for a Chinaman?"

"Not a Chinaman. . . ." Dr. Norton stroked his moustache and stared up at the ceiling. "But perhaps a native of Burma—or at least, as I should picture a native of Burma to look."

"There was Eastern blood of some sort in the Demurases," growled Gallaho. "They settled in London nearly a century ago, and at one time had a very big business as importers of Madeira wine. The firm has been extinct for twenty years. But there's a family vault in the old Catholic Cemetery, and that's where the body lies."

"I see."

And thereupon Nayland Smith did a singular thing. . . .

Crossing the room, he jerked a curtain aside, and threw up the window!

All watched him in mute astonishment. Waves of fog crept in, like the tentacles of some shadowy octopus. He was staring down in the direction of the street. He turned, reclosed the window and readjusted the curtain.

"Forgive me, Doctor," he said, smiling; and that rare smile, breaking through the grim mask, almost resembled the smile of an embarrassed schoolboy. "A liberty, I admit. But I had a sudden idea—and I was right."

"What?" growled Gallaho, ceasing the chewing operation, and shooting out his jaw.

"We've been followed. Somebody is watching the house. . . ."

CHAPTER 8

FOG IN HIGH PLACES

THAT PHENOMENAL FOG was getting its grip upon London again when the party set out. But in the specially equipped car, fair headway was made. At the mysterious, deserted house of Professor Ambroso, Gallaho and Sterling were dropped. The detective had certain important inquiries to make there relative to the accessibility of the adjoining ground-floor flat from the studio of Pietro Ambroso. Nayland Smith went on alone.

He had established contact by telephone from Dr. Norton's house with the man he was going to see. He knew this man, his lack of imagination, his oblique views of life. He knew that the task before him was no easy one. But he had attempted and achieved tasks that were harder.

The slow progress of the car was all but unendurable. Nayland Smith snapped his fingers irritably, peering out first from one window, then from another. In the brightly lighted West End streets better going was made, and at last the car pulled up before a gloomy, stone-porched house a few paces from Berkeley Square.

In a coldly forbidding library, a man sat behind a vast writing-table. Its appointments were frigidly correct. His white tie, for he was in evening dress, was a miracle of correctness. He did not stand up as Sir Denis was shown in by a butler whose proper occupation was that of an undertaker.

"Ah! Smith." He nodded and pointed to an armchair. "Just in time." He glanced at a large marble clock. "I have only five minutes."

Nayland Smith's nod was equally curt.

"Good evening, Sir Harold," he returned, and sat down in the hard, leather-covered chair.

Sir Denis Nayland Smith's relations with His Majesty's Secretary for Home Affairs had never been cordial. Indeed it is doubtful if Sir Harold Sims, in the whole course of his life, had ever known either friendship or love. Nayland Smith, staring at the melancholy face with its habitual expression of shocked surprise, thought that Sir Harold's scanty hair bore a certain resemblance to red tape chopped up. From a pocket of his tweed suit, Nayland Smith took out several documents, opened them, glanced at them, and then, standing up, placed them on the large, green blotting-pad before Sir Harold Sims.

"You know," said the latter, adjusting a pair of spectacles, and glancing down at the papers, "your methods have always been too fantastic for me, Smith. I mean, they were when you were associated with the Criminal Investigation Department. This thing, which you are asking me to do, is irregular—wholly irregular."

Nayland Smith returned to the armchair. A man of vision and dynamic energy, he always experienced, in the proximity of Sir Harold Sims, an all but unconquerable urge to pick up His Majesty's Secretary and to shake him until his teeth rattled.

"There are times, Sir Harold," he said, quietly, "when one can afford to dispense with formalities. In this case, your consent is necessary; hence my intrusion."

“You know——” Sims was scanning the documents suspiciously—“this bugbear of yours, this obsession with the person known as Fu Manchu, has created a lot of unpleasant feeling.”

This was no more than a statement of fact. Sir Denis’s retirement from the Metropolitan Police had coincided fairly closely with the appointment of Sir Harold to the portfolio which he still held.

“You may term it an obsession if you like—perhaps it is. But you are fully aware, Sir Harold, of the extent of my authority. I am not alone in this obsession. The most dangerous man living in the world to-day is here, in England, and likely to slip through our fingers. Any delay is dangerous.”

Sir Harold nodded, setting one document aside and beginning to read another.

“I shall be bothered by the Roman Catholic authorities,” he murmured; “you know how troublesome they can be. If you could give me two or three days, in order that the matter might be regularised. . . .”

“It is to-night, or never,” snapped Nayland Smith, suddenly standing up.

“Really. . . .”

Sir Harold began to shake his head again.

“It is perhaps unfair of me to remind you that I can bring pressure to bear.”

Sir Harold looked up.

“You are not suggesting that you would bother the Prime Minister with this trivial but complicated affair?” he asked pathetically.

“I am suggesting nothing. I only ask for your signature. I should not be here if the matter were as trivial as you suppose.”

“Really—really, Smith. . . .”

The light-blue eyes peering through spectacle lens were caught and arrested by the gaze of eyes deep-set, steely and penetrating. Sir Harold hated this man’s driving power—hated his hectoring manner, the force of a personality which brooked no denial. . . .

Five minutes later the police car was stealing through a mist, yellow, stifling, which closed in remorselessly, throttling London.

CHAPTER 9

THE TOMB OF THE DEMURASES

"YOU ARE SURE there is no other means of access to the cemetery?"

"Quite, sir."

The quavering voice of the old attendant was in harmony with his venerable but wretched appearance. He seemed to belong to the clammy mist; to the phantom monuments which peered through it. He might have been an exhalation from one of the ancient tombs. His straggling grey beard, his watery, nearly sightless eyes, his rusty black garb. A mental vision of Fleurette appeared before Alan Sterling—young, tall, divinely vigorous, an exquisite figure of health and beauty; yet perhaps she lay here, stricken down inscrutably in the bloom and fullness of spring, whilst such shadowy, unhappy beings as this old mortuary keeper survived, sadly watching each fallen bud returning to earth, our common mother, who gives us life, in whose arms we sleep.

"I've got men at both gates, sir," Gallaho growled, "and two more patrolling. Anybody suspicious, they have orders to hold. A rather queer thing has been reported: may have no bearing on the case, but——"

"What?" Nayland Smith asked.

"A small head-stone has been stolen!"

"A small head-stone?"

"Yes, Sir Denis. From a child's grave. Seems a useless sort of theft, doesn't it?"

"Possibly not!" he snapped. "I'm glad you mentioned this, Inspector."

He nodded to the old man.

A dim light shone out from the door of the lodge. It was difficult to imagine the domestic life of this strange creature whose home was amongst sepulchres; all but impossible to believe that he knew anything of human happiness; that joy had ever visited that ghastly habitation.

"Mr. Roberts?"

A young man wearing a dark, waisted overcoat and a muffler conceived in Eton colours, stepped languidly forward out of veiling mists. He wore a soft black hat of most fashionable shape; his small, aristocratic features registered intense boredom. From a pocket of his overcoat he produced a number of documents, and handed them to the old man, gingerly, as if offering a fish to a seal.

"Everything is in order," he said; "you need not trouble to look them over."

"There's no need to waste time," growled Gallaho. "Let's have the key." He raised his voice. "Dorchester!" he shouted.

A uniformed constable appeared, carrying a leather bag, as:

"I suppose it's all right," quivered the old mortuary keeper, looking down blindly at the papers in his hand. "But I shall have to enter it all up, you know."

"You can do that while we're on the job," said Gallaho. "The keys."

When, presently, led by a constable carrying a red lantern they proceeded in silence along a narrow path around which ghostly monuments clustered, it might have been noted, save that the light was poor, that Mr. Roberts, Sir Harold Sims' representative, looked unusually pale. To the left they turned, along another avenue of tombs, and then to the right again, presently penetrating to the oldest part of the cemetery. Grey and awesome, fronted by sentinel cypress trees, ill-nourished and drooping, a building resembling a small chapel loomed out of the fog. There was a little grassy forecourt fronted by iron railings, and a stained glass window right and left of a massive teak door intricately studded with iron nails. A constable in plain clothes was standing there.

"This is the Demuras vault, sir," he reported.

The company pulled up and stood for a moment looking at the building. Despite the chill of the night, Alan Sterling became aware of the fact that perspiration was trickling down his ribs. He glanced at Gallaho who held a bunch of keys in his hand, one separated from the others. The pugnacious face of the detective registered no emotion whatever. Nayland Smith turned to the plain clothes officer, and:

"There may be someone hiding among the monuments," he said, sharply. "You have seen nothing?"

"No, sir."

"If you see or hear anything, while we are inside—sing out, and do your best to make a capture."

"Very good, sir; you can leave it to me."

"Go ahead, Gallaho."

Gallaho opened the little gate, which was not locked, and advanced up three steps to the massive teak door. He inserted the key in the lock and turned it. It was very stiff; it creaked dismally, but responded—and the detective pushed the door open. . . .

When at last the party stood in the vault of the Demuras, dimly lighted by two police lamps and a red lantern, the fog had entered behind them, touching every man with phantom fingers. The dweller amongst the tombs arrived, belated, coming down the stone steps pantingly, and seeming a fitting occupant of this ghastly place.

"I understand," snapped Nayland Smith, "that this is the one we want." He pointed, then turned to Mr. Roberts. "Is it quite in accordance with the wishes of the Home Office that I should open this shell?"

Mr. Roberts drew a handkerchief from an inner pocket and delicately wiped his forehead. He had removed his black hat.

"Quite all right, Sir Denis. This is really rather distressing."

"I am sorry, but much is at stake."

Constable Dorchester came forward. He had discarded his helmet, revealing a closely cropped head of brilliantly red and vigorously upstanding hair. His hazel eyes glittered excitedly.

"Shall I start, sir?"

"Yes, carry on . . ."

Inspector Gallaho, twirling his wide-brimmed bowler in stubby muscular hands, chewed phantom gun. The old sexton stood at the foot of the steps in an attitude which

might have been that of prayer. Alan Sterling turned aside, looking anywhere but at the new and brightly polished sarcophagus which had been removed from its niche and which might contain . . .

A cracked bell in the mortuary chapel dimly chimed the hour.

"Do you mind if I wait outsider" said Mr. Roberts. "The fog seems to be settling in this place. It's following us in—look—it's coming down the steps in waves."

"Quite alright," growled Gallaho; "everything is in order, sir."

Mr. Roberts ascended the steps, brushing almost hastily past the ancient warden who stood head bowed, at their foot.

The squeak of the screws was harrowing. Long trailers of mist wavered fantastically in the dim opening. Generations of Demurases seemed to stir in their happy vineyards and to look down upon the intruders. It was a desecration of their peace—Nayland Smith knew it. By what means, he was unable to guess, but by some means, Dr. Fu Manchu had secured access to this mausoleum.

"Do you mind lending me a hand, sir?"

Constable Dorchester, the handyman of the party, addressed Alan Sterling. The latter turned, clenched his teeth, and:

"O.K.," he replied. "How can I help?"

"Just get hold of that end, sir, and ease it a bit. I'll get hold of this."

"Right."

Nayland Smith seemed to be listening for sounds from above. The watcher of the dead, hands clasped, was apparently praying. Chief-inspector Gallaho, from time to time, jerked out words of advice, and then resumed his phantom chewing.

The lid was removed. Sterling dropped back, raising his arms to his eyes.

"Steady!" rapped Nayland Smith. "Keep your grip, Sterling."

"May God forgive them, whoever they were," came the sepulchral voice of the old sexton.

The leaden shell had been sawn open and its top removed. . . .

"Who lies there?" Sterling whispered: "Who is it?"

None answered. Complete silence claimed the tomb of the Demurases, until:

"*Look!*" said Nayland Smith . . .

CHAPTER 10

THE MARK OF KALI

"SHALL I LOCK THE DOOR?" Inspector Gallaho inquired, jangling the keys.

Nayland Smith had been last to leave the tomb of the Demurases. That great fog which with brief intervals was destined to prevail for many days, already had claimed this city of the dead. They were a phantom company enveloped in a mist which might have been smoke of the Ultimate Valley. Alan Sterling was restraining an intense excitement.

Mr. Roberts, the Home Office representative, loomed up out of darkness.

"I understand that the shell was empty, Sir Denis?"

Nayland Smith came down the three steps.

"Not empty," he replied. "It was weighted with a head-stone stolen from near by!"

The old guardian of sepulchres stood by the open door. Bewilderment had lent that grey and sorrowful face a haunted expression, which might have belonged to the spirit of some early Demuras disturbed in the mausoleum.

Thereupon, Nayland Smith did a very odd thing. He stooped and began to remove his shoes!

"I say, Sir Denis——"

An upraised hand checked Alan Sterling at those first few words.

"Shut up, Sterling!" Sir Denis snapped. "Listen, everybody." He discarded his leather coat. "I am going back down there."

"Alone?" Gallaho asked.

"Yes."

"Good God!"

"As soon as I've slipped in, partly close the door. Sing out in a loud voice, 'Here are the keys, Sir Denis', or anything you like to convey the idea that I am with you. Understand?"

"Yes," Gallaho answered gruffly. "But if you suspect there's anybody hidden there, it's rather a mad move, isn't it, sir?"

"I can think of no other. Don't really lock the door," said Nayland Smith in a low voice. "Turn the key, but leave the door slightly ajar——"

"Very good, sir."

Soft-footed, Nayland Smith re-entered the tomb, turned and signalled with his hand. Gallaho began to close the heavy teak door.

"This is ghastly," Mr. Roberts muttered. "What does he expect to find?"

Gallaho rattled the keys, and:

"Shall I lock up, Sir Denis?" he said in his deep, gruff voice, paused a moment, and then: "Very good, sir. You go ahead; I'll follow."

He shot the lock noisily. The door was not more than an inch ajar.

"Silence!" he whispered. "Everybody stand by."

Beyond that ghostly door, guarded by sentinel cypresses, Nayland Smith was creeping down the stone steps, silently, stealthily. Gallaho had played his part well. All too familiar with red tape, Smith knew that short of sand-bagging the man from the Home Office, to have attempted to disturb the repose of another Demuras would have resulted in an adjournment of the investigation. Alone, and uninterrupted, he must convince himself that that queer impression of something which lived and moved in an ancient shell in a stone niche, must be confirmed or disproved by himself alone.

He reached the vault without having made a sound. His feet were chilled by the stone paving. Imagination charged the fog-laden atmosphere with odours of mortal decay. The darkness was intense. Looking up the steps down which he had come, no more than a vague blur indicated the presence of the stained glass windows. On hands and knees he moved cautiously, right, and then crouched down against the wall and directly beneath the niche which contained the mortal remains of Isobel Demuras—or so the inscription stated.

Complete silence prevailed for fully a minute. He could detect no repetition of that furtive movement which he had heard, or imagined he had heard. Turning slowly and cautiously, he looked up . . .

He saw a thing which for a moment touched him with awe.

The stone recess above had become vaguely illuminated, as if some spiritual light were thrown out from the shell of Isobel Demuras!

There came a vague shuffling—the same which he had detected when, last to leave, he had paused for a moment at the foot of the steps. Then . . . a ray of light shot across the vault, touching the further wall, where it rested upon a brass plate. The inscription upon this he remembered to have read: here lay Tristan Demuras, founder of the English branch of the family.

The noise above became louder. To it was added a squeaking sound. The ray disappeared from the opposite wall, but the niche above became more brightly illuminated. Nayland Smith on hands and knees crept to the corner of the vault. He had not vacated his former position more than three seconds when light poured down upon the pavement. He was just outside its radius.

The light disappeared; complete darkness fell. There came a renewed and a louder creaking, then a soft thud upon the floor beside him.

In that instant Nayland Smith sprang. . . .

"Gallaho!" he shouted. "Sterling!"

The teak door was opened with a crash. Gallaho shining his torch ahead of him came cluttering down the steps, Sterling close behind.

"The light . . . here, Gallaho—quick!" Nayland Smith spoke hoarsely. "Get his knife!"

"My God!"

Sterling sprang forward.

A lithe yellow man, his eyes on fire with venomous hatred, was struggling in Nayland Smith's grasp! Sir Denis had him by the throat, but with his left hand he

clutched the man's lean, muscular wrist. A knife, having a short, curved blade, was grasped in the sinewy fingers. For all Nayland Smith's efforts, its point was creeping nearer and nearer, driven by the maniacal strength which animated the tigerish body. The left arm of the yellow man was thrown around his captor, seeking to drag him down upon the quivering blade . . .

Gallaho twisted the weapon from the man's grasp, and Nayland Smith stood up, breathing heavily. Two constables had joined them now, their lamps reinforcing the illumination.

"Who's got bracelets?" growled Gallaho.

None of the party had handcuffs, but Constable Dorchester, of the spiky red hair, grabbed the prisoner and ran him up the steps.

Outside, held by Dorchester and another, his back against the teak door, he grinned fiendishly, but uttered no word whilst Nayland Smith resumed his shoes and put on his leather overcoat. Gallaho shone the light of a torch on to the face of the captive.

The man wore a soft shirt and no tie; a cheap flannel suit; his ankles were bare, and his lean feet were encased in rubber-soled shoes. His teeth gleamed in that fixed grin of hatred; his sunken eyes held a reddish, smouldering fire. Disordered oily black hair hung down over his forehead. He was panting and wet with perspiration.

Nayland Smith raised the damp hair from the man's brow, revealing a small mark upon parchment-like skin.

"The mark of Kali," he said. "I thought so . . . One of the Doctor's religious assassins."

"What ever is the meaning of all this?" Mr. Roberts demanded in a high, quavering voice.

Nayland Smith turned in the speaker's direction, so that from Sterling's point of view, the keen, angular profile was clearly visible against the light of a lamp held by one of the constables.

"It means," Sir Denis began . . .

Something hummed like a giant insect past Sterling's ear, missed Nayland Smith by less than an inch as he sprang back, fists clenched, glittered evilly in the lantern light, and . . . the man whose brow was branded with the mark of Kali gurgled, and became limp in the grip of his two big captors.

A bloody foam appeared upon his lips.

He was pinned to the door by a long, narrow-bladed knife, which had completely pierced his throat and had penetrated nearly an inch into the teak against which he stood!

CHAPTER 11

SAM PAK OF LIMEHOUSE

NAYLAND SMITH walked up and down his study in Whitehall. Heavy blue curtains were drawn before the windows. Alan Sterling from the depths of an armchair watched him gloomily.

"I am satisfied that the other shells in that vault were occupied by deceased Demurases," said Sir Denis. "How long the group has had access to that mausoleum, is something we are unlikely ever to know. But doubtless it has served other purposes in the past. The supposed sarcophagus of Isobel Demuras, as I showed you, was no more than a trick box or hiding-place, having a spy-hole by means of which one concealed there could watch what was going on below. It is certain that I have been covered closely for some days past. We were followed to Dr. Norton's house this evening, and later I was followed to the Home Secretary's. To make assurance doubly sure, the Doctor planted a spy in the mausoleum."

He paused, knocking out his pipe in the hearth.

"That knife was meant for me, Sterling," he said, grimly, "and Dr. Fu Manchu's thugs rarely miss."

"It was an act of Providence—the protection of heaven!"

"I agree. The reign of the Mandarin Fu Manchu is drawing to a close. The omens are against him. He smuggled Fleurette from Ambroso's studio to the cemetery. The device seems elaborate; but consider the difficulty of transporting an insensible girl!"

Sterling jumped up, a lean but athletic figure, clenching and unclenching his sunburned hands.

"Insensible—yes!" he groaned. "How do we know she isn't—dead. . . ."

"Because all the evidence points the other way. Dr. Fu Manchu is a good gambler; he would never throw away an ace. Consider the sheer brilliance of his asking police protection for Professor Ambroso—that is, for himself!"

"He had not anticipated that it would be continued in London."

"Possibly not."

He pressed a bell. A tall, gaunt manservant came in. A leathery quality in his complexion indicated that he had known tropical suns; his face was expressionless as that of a Sioux brave; his small eyes conveyed nothing.

"Set out a cold buffet in the dining-room, Fay," Nayland Smith directed.

Fay, seeming to divine by means of some extra sense that this completed his instructions, slightly inclined his close-cropped head and went out as silently as he had come in.

The telephone bell rang. Sir Denis took up the instrument, and:

"Yes," he said; "please show him up at once." He replaced the receiver. "Gallaho is downstairs. I hope this means that the deceased thug has been identified."

Sterling's restlessness was feverish.

"This waiting," he muttered, "is damnably trying."

Nayland Smith unscrewed the top of a tobacco jar.

"Get out your pipe," he snapped. "We'll have a drink when Gallaho arrives. You don't have to be jumpy—there's work ahead, and I'm counting on you."

Sterling nodded, clenched his white teeth, and plunged into a pocket of his suit for his pipe. At which moment, a bell rang. Sir Denis opened the door, crossed the lobby and faced Chief detective-inspector Gallaho at the very moment that the silent Fay admitted him. He could not wait for the Scotland Yard man to cross the threshold, but:

"Who was he?" he snapped; "do you know?"

"Got his history, sir, such as it is."

"Good."

The fog had penetrated to the lift-shaft of the building; wisps floated out on the landing and already were penetrating the lobby. When the inspector had come in:

"Have you had any dinner?" snapped Nayland Smith.

"No, sir. I haven't had time to think about eating."

"I thought not. There's a cold buffet in the dining-room, as I gather we may be late to-night. Am I right?"

"Quite probably, sir."

"Excellent."

Sterling had charged his pipe from the tobacco jar, and now Nayland Smith pulled out a tangle of broad-cut mixture and began stuffing it into the hot bowl of his own cracked briar.

"Help yourself to whisky and soda, Inspector," he said; "it's on the side table there. Please go ahead."

Gallaho nodded, took a glass and helped himself to a modest drink, then:

"The dead man has been identified by Detective-sergeant Pether, of K Division," he went on. "What Pether doesn't know about the Asiatics isn't worth knowing. Can I help you, sir?" indicating the decanter.

"Thanks, Inspector—and one for Mr. Sterling while you're there."

Gallaho, officiating as butler, continued:

"His real nationality, Pether doesn't know, but he's probably Burmese. He always passed for a lascar at Sam Pak's——"

"Sam Pak's?" rapped Nayland Smith.

"You're a bit out of touch with Limehouse, sir," said Gallaho, handing a tumbler to Sir Denis and one to Sterling. "But Sam Pak's is a small restaurant frequented by seamen from ships docking in the river. It's generally known that opium and hashish can be got there. But as its use seems to be confined to the Asiatics, we have never moved. There have been no complaints. Well——" he took a sip of his whisky and soda—"It seems that the dead man was known as 'Charlie'—apparently he had no other name; and sometimes he used to act as waiter for Sam Pak."

"Highly important," murmured Nayland Smith, beginning to walk up and down. "A very strong link, Gallaho. The Doctor's on the run. His available servants are few, and

he's back in his old haunts. Very significant. Could you give me a brief character sketch of this Sam Pak?"

"I can try, sir. Pether knows him better than I do, but I didn't bother to bring him along. Let me see . . ." He chewed imaginary gum, staring up at the ceiling, then: "Sam Pak is a small, old, very wrinkled Chinaman. He might be any age up to, say, a hundred. He has run this restaurant for the past four years. He has a voice like a tin whistle, and speaks pidgin English."

"Stop!" snapped Nayland Smith. "Detective-sergeant Fletcher of K Division retired some years ago, didn't he?"

"He did, sir," Gallaho replied, rather startled. "He's landlord of the George and Dragon in Commercial Road. I happen to know him well."

"Get through to the George and Dragon," Nayland Smith directed. "Find out if Fletcher is home, and if so, ask him to come on the line."

"Very good, sir. . . . Now?"

"You might as well; I want to think. You can use the telephone in the lobby."

"Very good, sir."

Inspector Gallaho went out, carrying his tumbler, and:

"You know," said Nayland Smith, turning and staring at Sterling, "I have an idea that I know Sam Pak. I believe he is a certain John Ki, who disappeared from Chinatown some years ago. He was one of Fu Manchu's people, Sterling. I should like to be sure."

Sterling had lighted his pipe and had dropped back into the big armchair, but his mood was far from restful. He sat there, clutching the arms, watching Sir Denis pacing up and down the carpet. Suddenly:

"On your word of honour, Sir Denis," he said, "do you think she's alive?"

Nayland Smith turned and fixed an unflinching gaze upon the speaker.

"On my word of honour," he replied, "I do."

"Thank God!" Sterling murmured. "You're a rock of refuge!"

"He's well on the run," Sir Denis continued, grimly, the cold grey-blue eyes alight with suppressed excitement. "He has doubled back to his riverside haunts. He's finding it difficult to raise funds. The police of Europe are on his tail. He's a cornered rat, and dangerous. The Mandarin Prince has become the common criminal. I wonder if it's to be his fate, Sterling, that having threatened the safety of nations, he is to fall captive to an ordinary Metropolitan police officer? That would be poetic justice, indeed. In the past, he has shown them scant mercy."

Sterling watched the speaker fascinatedly. He radiated vitality; the force within him vibrated through one's nerves. Only a man who had known Dr. Fu Manchu, as Sterling knew him, could have doubted that the Chinaman's fate was sealed. But knowing, and appreciating, the genius of the great Eastern physician, Sterling, with optimism crying out for recognition in his heart, was forced to admit that the betting was even. Sir Denis Nayland Smith would have been an impossible adversary for any normal man to pit himself against, but Dr. Fu Manchu was *not* a normal man. He was a superman, Satan materialized, and one equipped with knowledge which few had ever achieved: a cold,

dominating intellect, untrammelled by fleshly ties, a great mind unbound by laws of man.

The silence which fell was only broken by faint ringings of a telephone bell and the distant rumbling of the voice of Inspector Gallaho. Nayland Smith walked up and down. Sterling smoked, and clutched the arms of the chair. Then, Gallaho, still carrying his glass which now was empty, returned.

"I've found him, sir," he reported, "and by great good luck, got him on the 'phone."

CHAPTER 12

LONDON RIVER

A CONSTABLE PATROLLING the Embankment pulled up and stared suspiciously at a pair of dangerous-looking loafers, possibly sailors, of a type rarely seen in the Westminster area; very dark-skinned fellows wearing greasy caps and smoking cigarettes. To that lurching walk that belongs to the sea, a certain furtive quality seemed to have been added. Some of these foreign sailormen had other jobs when they were ashore, and the officer didn't like the way in which this pair kept staring up towards a certain lighted window in a block of expensive residential flats.

A strong westerly breeze had sprung up, driving banks of fog before it, so that in certain areas, temporarily, the night was clear enough. Such a lucidity prevailed now in this part of Westminster. The face of Big Ben was clearly visible, no great distance away, and the many lighted windows of New Scotland Yard. But whereas most of the windows in the block of flats were shaded, that one which seemed to interest the pair of watchers, a large, bay window, had neither curtains nor blinds drawn.

From time to time a man, apparently tall and thin, and who might have been in evening dress, appeared in this window. One would have supposed that he was pacing up and down the room to which it belonged. He was smoking a pipe.

Yes, the officer was certain, it was this window or this man, or both, that the loafers were watching. He determined upon action. Quickly retracing his steps:

"What are you two up to?" he demanded, gruffly.

The shorter of the pair started and turned. He had deep-set, very bright eyes, and a truculence of manner which the constable regarded as suspicious. His companion grasped his arm, and:

"*Lêltak sa'îda*," he said.

The officer could not be expected to know that the man had wished him good night in Arabic.

The pair moved off slouchingly.

"Don't hang about here," the constable continued, following them up. "Get a move on."

"*Khatrâk!*" replied the taller man.

The constable watched them lurching away, unaware that the word meant "good-bye". They did not loiter again, but went on their way. The officer, retracing his steps, glanced up at the lighted window. The tall man smoking a pipe became visible for a moment, then turned and disappeared.

As the two foreign sailormen whose language was presumably Arabic proceeded on their way:—

"Comedy interlude with policeman?" snapped the taller. "Do you think Fay looks the part?"

"I should never have suspected it wasn't you up there, Sir Denis," the other replied. "But, except the constable, did you notice anyone watching?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"A man apparently asleep on the stone steps nearly opposite my window, with a tray of matches on the pavement before him."

"Good God! Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then we've thrown them off this time?"

"I think so, Sterling. We must be careful how we join Gallaho and Forester. This is a case where a return of the fog would be welcome. Is there anyone behind?"

Sterling glanced back.

"No, not near enough to count."

"Good. This way, then."

He gripped Sterling suddenly, pulling him aside.

"Duck under here! Now, over the wall!"

A moment later they stood at the foot of some stone steps. A dinghy lay there, occupied by one rower, a man who wore the uniform of the River Police. As the pair appeared:

"Careful how you come aboard, sir," he said; "those lower steps are very slimy."

However, they embarked without accident, and ten minutes later were inside the dingy little office of the River Police depôt. Chief Detective-inspector Gallaho was leaning against the mantelpiece chewing phantom gum, his bowler worn at that angle made famous by Earl Beatty in the Navy. Forester, a thick-set man who looked more like a Mercantile skipper than a police officer, stood up as the hang-dog couple entered.

"Do you think you've covered your tracks, sir?" he asked, addressing Sir Denis.

"I hope so," snapped the latter. "But anyway, we have to go on now. Too much valuable time has been wasted already."

Big Ben chimed the hour. A high pall of fog still overhung the city, and the booming notes of the big clock seemed to come from almost directly overhead.

"Eleven o'clock. Is it fairly clear down-river, Inspector?"

"It was clearing when I came up, sir," Forester replied. "A lot of shipping is on the move, now. Some of them have been locked up for twenty-four hours. But I'm told it's still very thick in the Channel."

"Sam Pak's I take it, does not close early?"

Inspector Forester laughed.

"To the best of my knowledge it never closes," he replied. "Cigarettes and drinks, of a sort, can be had there all night by anyone in the know."

"Habitual law-breaker?" Nayland Smith suggested.

"Exactly, sir. But he's a safety-valve."

"I quite understand. No news from Fletcher?"

"No, sir. I have been expecting it for the last half-hour."

Nayland Smith glanced at a gun-metal watch strapped to his wrist, and:

"I'll give him five minutes," he said, rapidly. "Then, we'll start. The fog may develop at any moment if this breeze drops. You can arrange for any news to be passed down?"

"Certainly, sir."

At which moment, the 'phone bell rang.

"Hello!" the Inspector's voice was eager. "Yes, speaking. He's here—hold on." He turned. "Fletcher on the line, sir."

Nayland Smith took the instrument from the Inspector's hand, and:

"Hello, that you, Fletcher?" he asked.

"Fletcher speaking, sir, and it's like old times to hear your voice. I've been out of touch with Limehouse for some years, but I was really glad of to-night's job. I dropped into this man's place to buy a packet of cigarettes, and managed to stay long enough to get a glimpse of the old boy."

"Well?"

"You're right, sir. It's John Ki, formerly keeper of the *Joy Shop*, now known as Sam Pak."

"Good." Nayland Smith's eyes shone like burnished steel in the mulatto mask of his face. "You didn't arouse his suspicions, of course?"

"Certainly not, sir. I didn't even speak to him—and he couldn't be expected to remember me."

"Good enough, Fletcher. You can go home now. I'll get in touch with you to-morrow."

He replaced the receiver and turned.

"That seems to clinch it," growled Gallaho. "With any luck we ought to make a capture to-night."

Nayland Smith was walking up and down the linoleum covered floor, twitching at the lobe of his left ear.

"Give me some brief idea of your arrangements, Gallaho," he snapped.

"Well . . ." Gallaho closed one eye and cocked the other in the direction of the ceiling: "Inspector Forester, here, has got a cutter tucked away within easy call, with a crew of six. They're watching the place from the river side. Nobody can get out that way. I sent eight men, picked them myself, who are used to this sort of work. You won't see a sign of them when you arrive, but they'll see you, sir."

"Anybody inside?" snapped Nayland Smith.

"Yes," said Gallaho, grinning. "Detective-sergeant Murphy. Fast asleep in the 'club-room'. He's the most wonderful 'drunk' in the C.I.D."

"Good. It's time we started."

CHAPTER 13

A TONGUE OF FIRE

The Port of London had suddenly come to life. A big liner, fog-bound for a day and a night, was bellowing her warning to all whom it might concern as she crept slowly from her dock into the stream. Tugs towing strings of barges congested the waterway. The shipping area was a blaze of light, humming with human activity. That narrow stretch of waterfront behind which lies the ever-dwindling area of Chinatown, alone seemed to remain undisturbed under these new conditions.

Here, a lazy tide lapped muddily at ancient piles upholding pier and wharf and other crazy structures of a sort long since condemned and demolished in more up-to-date districts. The River Police launch lay just outside a moored barge. From this point of vantage the lookout had a nearly unobstructed view of a sort of wooden excrescence which jutted out from a neighbouring building.

It overhung a patch of mud, covered at high tide, into which it seemed to threaten at any moment to fall. It boasted two windows: one looking straight across the river to the Surrey bank and the other facing up-stream. There was a light in this latter window, and the River Police were watching it, curiously.

From time to time a bent figure moved past it—a queer, shuffling figure. For fully ten minutes, however, this figure had not re-appeared.

Each warning of the big steamer reached them more faintly. One of the police crew, who had been a ship's steward, shivered slightly; picturing the warmly lighted cabins, the well-ordered life on board the out-going liner; sniffed in imagination the hot, desert air of Egypt; glimpsed the palm groves of Colombo, and wondered why he had ever joined the police. A tow-boat passed very close to them, creating a temporary swell in which they rocked and rolled violently. The breeze carried some of her smoke across their bows, making them blink and cough. When, suddenly:

"There it is again," muttered the ex-steward.

"What are you talking about?" growled the officer in charge, heartily fed-up with this monotonous duty.

"That blue light, Sergeant."

"What blue light?"

"Nearly over the roof of Sam Pak's. It's the fourth time I've seen it."

"I can't see anything."

"No. It's just gone again."

"You're a bit barmy, aren't you?"

"I've seen it too, Sergeant," came another voice. "Not to-night for the first time, either."

"What?"

"I first saw it early last week. I was with the four o'clock boat. It sort of dances in the air, high up over the roof."

"That's right," said the other man.

"Something like a gasworks," the sergeant suggested facetiously.

"That's it, Sergeant, only not so bright, and it doesn't stay long. Just comes and goes."

The tide lapped and sucked and whispered all around them. The deep voice of the liner moaned down-stream. Metal crashed on metal in the dockyard, and the glare of a million lights created the illusion of a tent stretched overhead; for that high pall still floated above London, angrily, as if waiting to settle again at the first opportunity.

A bent figure moved slowly past the lighted window.

"Tell me if you see it again," said the sergeant.

Silence fell upon the watchers . . .

"Hello!—who's this?" the sergeant growled.

The creaking of oars proclaimed itself, growing ever nearer. Hidden in shadows, the River Police watched the approach of a small rowboat. The rower had all the appearance of a typical waterman. He had two passengers.

"What's this?" muttered the sergeant. "I believe he's making for Sam Pak's . . . *Ssh!* quiet!"

The crew of six watched eagerly; any break in the monotony of their duty was welcome. The sergeant's prediction was fulfilled. The boat was pulled in close to rotting piles which at some time had supported a sort of jetty. At the margin of mud and shingle, the two passengers disembarked, making a perilous way along slippery wooden girders until they reached the sloping strand. The crunch of their heavy boots was clearly audible; and as the boatman pulled away, the two mounted a wooden stair and disappeared into a dark opening.

"H'm!" said the sergeant. "Of course, they may not be going to Sam's. People are often ferried across here. It's a short cut to the 'bus route. Hello!"

He stood suddenly upright in the bows of the launch, and might have been seen staring upward at a point high above the roof of Sam Pak's establishment.

"There you are, Sergeant . . . that's what I meant!"

A curious, blue light played there against the pall above. At one moment it resembled a serpent's tongue, or rather, the fiery tongue of a dragon; then it would change and become a number of little, darting tongues; suddenly, it disappeared altogether.

"Well—I'm damned!" said the sergeant. "That's a very queer thing. Where the devil can it come from?"

CHAPTER 14

AT SAM PAK'S

THE EXTERIOR of Sam Pak's presented the appearance of a small and unattractive Chinese restaurant, where also provisions might be purchased and taken away.

As one entered, there was a counter on the left; the air was informed with an odour of Bombay duck and other Chinese delicacies. Tea might be purchased or drunk on the establishment, for there were two or three cane-topped tables on the other side of the shop. Although midnight had come and gone, lights were still burning in this shop, and a very fat woman of incalculable nationality was playing some variety of patience behind the counter, and smoking cigarettes continuously.

A curious, spicy smell, mingling with that of the provisions indicated that joss-sticks might be purchased here; rice, also, and various kinds of cold eatables, suitable for immediate consumption. Excepting the fat lady, there was no one else in the shop at the moment that Nayland Smith and Sterling entered.

They had been well schooled by a detective attached to K Division, and Nayland Smith, taking the lead, leaned on the counter, and:

"Cigarette please, Lucky Strike," he said, his accent and intonation that of one not very familiar with English.

The lady behind the counter hesitated for a moment, and then put another card in place. Laying down those which she still held in her hand, she reached back, abstracted a packet of the desired cigarettes from a shelf, and tossed it down before the customer, without so much as glancing at him.

He laid a ten shilling note near to her hand.

"Damn thirsty," he continued; "got a good drink?"

Piercing black eyes were raised instantaneously. Both men recognized that at that moment they were being submitted to a scrutiny as searching as an X ray examination. Those gimlet eyes were lowered again. The woman took the note, dropped it into a wooden bowl, and from the bowl extracted silver change.

"Who says you get a drink here?" she muttered.

"All sailors know Sam Pak keeps good beer," Nayland Smith replied rapidly, in that Shanghai vernacular which sometimes passes for Chinese.

The woman smiled; her entire expression changed. She looked up, replying in English.

"How you know Chinese?" she asked.

"Live for ten year in Shanghai."

"You want beer or whisky?"

"Beer."

The woman pushed a little paper pad forward across the counter, and handed the speaker a pencil.

The paper was headed "Sailors' Club."

"Please, your name here," she said; then, glancing at Sterling, "your friend too."

Nayland Smith shrugged his shoulders as if helplessly, and then, laboriously traced out some characters to which no expert alive could possibly have attached any significance or meaning.

"Name of ship, please, here."

A stubby finger, with a very dirty nail, rested upon a dotted line on the form. They had come prepared for this, and Nayland Smith wrote, using block letters in the wrong place "*s. s. Pelican*".

"Now you, please."

The beady eyes were fixed on Sterling. He wrote what looked like "John Lubba" and put two pencil dots under Smith's inscription—*s. s. Pelican*.

"One shilling each," said the woman, extracting a two shilling piece from the change and dropping the coin into the wooden bowl. "You members now for one week."

She pressed a bell-button which stood upon the counter near to her hand, and a door at the end of the little shop was opened.

Nayland Smith, carefully counting his change, replaced it in a pocket of his greasy trousers, and turned as a very slender Chinese boy who walked with so marked a stoop as to appear deformed, came into the shop. He wore an ill-fitting suit and a red muffler, but, incongruously, a small, black Chinese cap upon his head. Perhaps, however, the most singular item of his make-up, and that which first struck one's attention, was an eye-patch which obscured his left eye, lending his small, pale yellow features a strangely sinister appearance. To this odd figure the stout receptionist, tearing off the form from the top of the block, passed the credentials of the two new members, saying rapidly in Chinese:

"For the files."

Sterling did not understand, but Nayland Smith did; and he was satisfied. They were accepted.

The one-eyed Chinese boy signalled that they should follow, and they proceeded along a short, narrow passage to the "Club." This was a fair-sized room, the atmosphere of which was all but suffocating. Ventilation there was none. A velvet-covered divan, indescribably greasy and filthy, ran along the whole of one wall, tables being set before it at intervals. At the farther end of the place was a bar, and, on the left, cheap wicker chairs and tables. The centre of the floor was moderately clear. It was uncarpeted and some pretence had been made, at some time, to polish the deal planks.

The company present was not without interest.

At a side table, two Chinamen were playing Mah jong, a game harmless enough, but interdict in Limehouse. At another table, a party, one of whom was a white girl, played fan-tan, also illegal in the Chinese quarter. The players spoke little, being absorbed in their games.

Although the fog had cleared from the streets of Limehouse and from the river, one might have supposed that this stuffy room had succeeded in capturing a considerable section of it. Visibility was poor. Tobacco smoke predominated in the "club," but with

it other scents were mingled. Half a dozen nondescripts were drinking and talking—mostly, they drank beer. One visitor seated alone at the end of the divan, elbows resting on the table before him, glared sullenly into space. He had a shock of dark hair, and his complexion was carrot-coloured. His prominent nose was particularly eloquent.

"Gimme another drink, Sam," he kept demanding. "Gimme another drink, Sam."

Save for two chairs set before the table upon which the thirsty man rested his elbows, there was no visible accommodation in the "Sailors' Club."

"Go ahead!" Nayland Smith whispered in Sterling's ear. "Grab those two chairs."

No one took the slightest notice of their entrance, and walking towards the bar, they seated themselves in the two vacant chairs. The one-eyed boy stood by for orders.

"Two pints beer," said Nayland Smith in his queer broken English.

The boy went to the bar to give the order. And the barman to whom he gave it was quite easily the outstanding personality in the room. He was a small Chinaman, resembling nothing so much as an animated mummy. His chin nearly met his nose, for apparently he was quite toothless; and there was not an inch of his skin, nor a visible part of his bald head, which was not intricately traced with wrinkles. His eyes, owing to the puckering of the skin, were almost invisible, and his hands when they appeared from behind the counter resembled the talons of some large bird.

"Gimme another drink, Sam," hiccupped the man on the divan. "Never mind these blokes—gi' *me* another drink."

One elbow slipped and his head fell right forward on the table.

"O.K. sir," came a low whisper. "Detective-sergeant Murphy. Something funny going on here to-night, sir."

Nayland Smith turned to the aged being behind the bar.

"Give him another drink," he said rapidly in Chinese. "Charge me. He is better asleep than awake."

The incredible features of Sam Pak drew themselves up in a ghastly contortion which may have been a smile.

"It is good," he whistled in Chinese—"a sleeping fool may pass for a wise man."

The one-eyed boy was bending over the counter, placing the mugs on a tray. Sterling watched, and suddenly:

"Sir Denis," he whispered—"look! That isn't a boy's figure."

"Gimme a drink," blurted Murphy; then, in a whisper: "It isn't a boy, sir—it's a *girl* . . ."

CHAPTER 15

A LIGHTED WINDOW

FORESTER of the River Police had taken charge of the party covering Sam Pak's from the Thames. His presence, which was unexpected, had infused a new spirit into the enterprise. The fact that he was accompanied by the celebrated Inspector Gallaho of the C.I.D., caused a tense but respectful silence to fall upon the party. Everyone knew now that some very important case lay behind this monotonous duty.

A sort of rumour hitherto submerged, now ran, magically from man to man, the presence of the famous detective lending it wings.

"It's the Fu Manchu business—I told you so. . . ."

"He's been dead for years. . . ."

"If you ever have the bad luck to meet him, you'll . . ."

"Silence on board!" said Forester, in a low but authoritative voice. "This isn't a picnic: you're on duty. Listen—isn't one of you an able-bodied seaman?"

The ex-steward spoke up.

"I was an A.B., sir, before I became a steward."

"You're the man I want. You see that lighted window—the one that belongs to Sam Pak's?"

"Yes, sir."

"It isn't more than three feet below the roof and there's plenty of foothold. Do you think you could climb it?"

There was a moment of silence, and then:

"To the roof, sir?"

"Yes."

"I could try. There wouldn't be much risk if the tide was in, but I'm not so sure of the mud."

"How do you feel about it?"

"I'll take a chance."

"Good man," growled Gallaho. "Inspector Forester has brought a rope ladder. We want you to carry a line up to make the ladder fast. The idea is to get a look in at that lighted window. Bear it in mind. But for the love of Mike, don't make any row. We are taking chances."

Merton, the ex-sailor, rather thought that *he* was the member of the party who was taking chances. He was endeavouring to find suitable words in which to express this idea, when:

"That's a good man, Inspector," snapped a voice from the barge. "Always keep your eye on a man who volunteers for dangerous duty."

Merton looked up as two men who resembled Portuguese deck-hands dropped from the barge into the tail of the cutter. But the speaker's voice held an unmistakable note. Rumour had spoken truly.

The presence of Inspector Gallaho had started tongues wagging; here was someone vastly senior to Gallaho, and masquerading in disguise. The attitude of the famous C.I.D. detective was sufficient evidence of the seniority of the last speaker.

The River Police craft was eased alongside the rotting piles which supported that excrescence of Sam Pak's restaurant. Merton swarmed up without great difficulty towards a point just below the lighted window. Here he paused, making signs to the crew below.

"Push out," snapped Nayland Smith in a low voice.

The little craft was eased away, and Merton, carrying the line, proceeded to the second and more difficult stage of his journey, watched breathlessly by every man aboard the River Police launch. Twice he faltered, and, once, seemed to have lost his hold. But at last a sort of sympathetic murmur ran around the watching party.

He had reached the roof of the wooden structure. He waved, and began to haul in the line attached to the rope ladder.

A stooping figure passed behind the lighted window . . .

Merton, in response to signals from Gallaho, moved further left, so that when the ladder was hauled up it just cleared the window. Some delay followed whilst Merton, disappearing from the view of those below, sought some suitable stanchion to which safely to lash the ladder. This accomplished, he gave the signal that all was fast, and:

"As soon as I'm on the ladder," said Nayland Smith, "get back to cover. The routine, as arranged, holds good."

He began to climb . . . and presently he could look in at the lighted window.

CHAPTER 16

A BURNING GHAT

A WOMAN attired in scanty underwear was pulling on high-heeled, jade green shoes. She was seated on a cheap and dilapidated wooden chair. Depended upon a hanger on the wall behind this chair, was a green frock, which Nayland Smith guessed to be probably a creation of Worth. A dressing-table of a kind which can only be found in the second-hand stores appeared at one end of the small rectangular room. It was set before a window, and this was the window of the wooden superstructure which looked out towards the Surrey bank of the Thames. A flannel suit, a pair of shoes, a muffler, and a Chinese cap, lay upon the floor.

Fascinated and unashamed, Nayland Smith watched the toilet of the woman who squeezed tiny feet into tiny jade green shoes.

She stood up, walked to the mirror, and smeared her face with cream from a glass jar which once had contained potted meat. The features of the one-eyed Chinese waiter became obliterated.

The classic features of Fah Lo Suee, daughter of Dr. Fu Manchu, revealed themselves!

Fah Lo Suee, having cleansed her skin, hurriedly carried the one chair to the dressing-table, and seating herself before a libellous mirror, set to work artistically to make up as a beautiful woman; for that she was a beautiful woman Nayland Smith had never been able to deny.

Silently, cautiously, he began to descend. The River Police craft was pulled in beneath him. Forester and a member of the crew hung on to the end of the ladder as Nayland Smith came aboard.

"Put me ashore," he snapped. "Gallaho! Sterling! Then stand by for Merton."

Sterling grabbed the speaker's arm. His grip was violent in its intensity.

"Sir Denis!" he said—"for God's sake tell me—who is up there? What did you see?"

Nayland Smith turned. They were alongside the barge, across the deck of which they had come, and by the same route were returning.

"Your old friend Fah Lo Suee! When I gave the sign to Murphy and came out, I thought you had recognized her, too. I was interested in the fact that she seemed to have a base somewhere upstairs."

"Fah Lo Suee," Sterling muttered. "Good heavens! now that you point it out, of course, I realize it *was* Fah Lo Suee."

"The Doctor is using her remorselessly: every hour of her day is fully occupied. Late though it is, she has some other duty to perform. She must be followed, Sterling."

They were crossing the deck of the barge, Gallaho at their heels, his bowler hat jammed on at a rakish angle, when:

"*Look!*" said Nayland Smith.

With one hand he grabbed the C.I.D. man, with the other he grasped the arm of Sterling.

A wavering blue light, a witch light, an elfin thing, danced against the fog mantle over the house of Sam Pak.

"Good Lord!" Gallaho muttered. "I heard of it for the first time to-night, but I'm damned if I can make out what it is."

All watched in silence for a while. Suddenly, the mystic light disappeared.

"It looks like something out of hell," said Gallaho.

"Very possibly it is," Nayland Smith jerked. He turned to Sterling. "Did you notice anything curious about the air of the Sailors' Club?"

"It had the usual fuggy atmosphere of places of that kind."

"Certainly it had, but did anything in the temperature strike you?"

"Temperature . . . ?"

"Exactly."

"Now that you mention it, it was certainly very hot."

"Undoubtedly it was, and twice as hot at the bar end as at the other."

"Maybe it's central heated," said Gallaho. "I'll ask Murphy about it."

"Nothing of the kind," snapped Nayland Smith. He was still staring up at that spot above the roof of Sam Pak's where the queer, spirituous flame had appeared. "Certain sects in India burn their dead on burning ghats. Were you ever in India, Gallaho?"

"No sir. But whatever do you mean?"

"You would know what I meant if you had ever seen a burning ghat at night. . . ."

CHAPTER 17

THE GAME FLIES WEST

"WHICHEVER WAY the dame comes out," said Gallaho, "she's got to pass this corner to get on to the main road. It's a pound to a penny there's another way out into that yard which adjoins the restaurant, and I'm told that a car is sometimes garaged there. It may be there to-night."

"Evidently it is," said Nayland Smith. "Listen." Gallaho ceased speaking and he and Sterling listened intently. Someone had started a car at no great distance away.

"Quick!" snapped Nayland Smith. "Your man's standing by?"

"Yes."

"I'll wait here. I want to see who is in the car. Directly it has passed, pick me up. . . ."

Gallaho and Sterling set off down a side-turning. In a narrow opening between a deserted warehouse and the adjoining building, the Flying Squad car was hidden, all lights out. They had no more than reached it, when the car from the yard beside Sam Pak's passed the head of the street.

The Scotland Yard driver pulled out smartly. On the corner he checked and Nayland Smith jumped in.

"Fah Lo Suee!" he said simply.

Sam Pak's remained under cover. Anyone leaving would be shadowed to his destination, but Smith's instructions were urgent upon the point that the suspicions of the old Chinaman must not be aroused. . . .

Deserted Commercial Road East reached, the police car drew up closer to the quarry—for at one point a curtain of fog threatened to descend again. Beyond, however, it became clearer.

"What car is it, Gallaho?" Nayland Smith asked. "I can't quite make out."

"It's a Morris, sir, and they're making it shift a bit."

Nayland Smith laughed shortly.

"Once, it would have been at least a Delage," he murmured.

Silence fell again as they proceeded along one of the most depressing thoroughfares in Europe. Occasional lorries bound dockward constituted practically the only traffic: pedestrians were very few indeed. The occasional figure of a policeman wearing his waterproof cape brought the reflection to Sterling's mind that the duties of the Metropolitan Police force would not appeal to every man.

Entering the City boundaries, the driver pulled up much closer to the pursued car. By the Mansion House the fog had disappeared altogether. Sterling glanced aside at Sir Denis. The bright light of a street lamp was shining in. He started, then laughed aloud. Shadow came again.

"What is it?" snapped Sir Denis.

“I had forgotten what you looked like,” Sterling explained, “and your appearance was rather a shock.”

“Anyone seeing us,” growled Gallaho, “would take it for granted that I had one of you chained to each wrist.” He turned to Sir Denis. “I don’t quite understand, sir, why you have handed the Limehouse end of the inquiry over to Forester. You have got definite evidence that it’s the base of this Fu Manchu. Why not raid it? There’s every excuse, if ever we want to do it. It’s only necessary to find a single opium pipe on the premises!”

“I know,” Nayland Smith replied, speaking unusually slowly. “But in dealing with Dr. Fu Manchu, I have found it necessary to follow certain instincts. These may be the result of an intimate knowledge of the Doctor’s methods. But having been inside Sam Pak’s to-night, I am prepared to assert with complete confidence that Dr. Fu Manchu is not there. I think it highly probable that his beautiful and talented daughter is leading us to him now, however.”

“Oh, I see,” Gallaho growled. “You don’t think by any chance that this fly dame spotted you through your disguise, and is making a getaway?”

“I don’t think so. But it is a possibility, nevertheless.”

“I mean,” the detective went on doggedly, “it isn’t clear to me what she was doing down there, unless her job was that of a lookout. You tell me she’s very much the lady, so that her idea of fun wouldn’t be serving beer to drunken sailormen?”

“Quite,” murmured Nayland Smith.

After which staccato remark he fell into a reverie which he did not break until the great bell of St. Paul’s boomed out from high above their heads.

“Two o’clock,” he murmured, and peered ahead. “Hello! Fleet Street. The game flies West, Gallaho.”

The Street of Ink was filled with nocturnal activity, in contrast to the deserted City thoroughfares along which, hitherto, their route had lain. Into the Strand, across Trafalgar Square and on to Piccadilly, the hunt led; then the Morris turned into Bond Street, and Gallaho broke a long silence.

“I’ve just remembered,” he remarked, “that they’ve got an extension at the Ambassadors’ Club to-night. Funny if that’s where she’s going.”

“H’m!” said Nayland Smith, glancing aside at Sterling, as the light from the window of a picture dealer’s shone into the car. “We sha’n’t be able to obtain admittance!”

“Just what I was thinking,” growled Gallaho. “Yes—look, sir! That is where she’s going!”

The Morris pulled up before the door of the club, and a commissionaire assisted a slender, fur-wrapped figure to alight. Fah Lo Suee, her jade coloured shoes queerly reflected upon the wet pavement, her gossamer frock concealed beneath a white wrap, went in at the lighted doorway.

“I can soon find out who she’s with and what she’s up to,” growled Gallaho. “You two gentlemen had better stay out of sight.”

He stepped out and proceeded in the direction of the club.

By the entrance he paused for a moment as another car pulled up and the be-medalled commissionaire sprang forward to the door. A distinguished looking gentleman who might have been a diplomat, who affected a grey, pointed beard and who wore a monocle, stepped out hurriedly, discarded a French cape and, tossing it back into the car, nodded to the commissionaire and went in. He vibrated nervous energy.

"H'm!" muttered Gallaho, watching the long, fawn and silver car disappearing in the direction of Bruton Street. "Sir Bertram Morgan!"

The last arrival was the newly appointed governor of the Bank of England.

Gallaho was about to turn to the commissionaire, with whom he was acquainted, when, following from the tail of his eye the slim, debonaire figure of the banker, he saw a slender woman dressed in jade green rise from a settee in the lobby and advance with extended hand to meet Sir Bertram.

In the brief glimpse which he had of her, Gallaho recognized the fact that she was the woman they had followed from Limehouse—according to Sir Denis Nayland Smith, the daughter of Dr. Fu Manchu. She was not pure Chinese. She was exotically beautiful. The strange pair disappeared.

Gallaho changed his mind.

"Good evening, sir," said the commissionaire, and was about to salute; then grinned broadly and nodded instead.

"Good," said Gallaho. "I am glad you remembered. Never salute a plain clothes officer."

"No, sir."

"Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Gallaho walked on as though his presence there had been merely accidental. Within his limitations he was an artist. It was no uncommon thing for the tracker to be tracked; keen eyes might be watching his every movement.

He crossed to Grafton Street, stood on the corner for a while, and looked back. Accustomed to the ways of spies, he was satisfied that no one was on his trail. He retraced his steps—but on the other side of Bond Street.

CHAPTER 18

"I BELONG TO CHINA"

Sir Bertram Morgan was deeply intrigued with Madame Ingomar. He had met her three years before at the villa of a mutual friend in Cairo. Anglo-Egyptian society is not exactly Bohemian, and Sir Bertram, at first, had been surprised to find an obvious, if beautiful, half-caste a guest at this somewhat exclusive establishment.

She was, it appeared, the widow of a physician. But this alone was not enough. And noting the patrician elegance, almost disdain, which characterized the beautiful widow, Sir Bertram had not been surprised to learn, later, that on her father's side there was royal Manchu blood.

An experienced man of the world is the adventuress's easiest quarry. Sir Bertram, a widower of almost illimitable means, naturally knew much of women; he thought there was no design whose pattern he had not met with at some time. He distrusted Madame Ingomar. But she attracted him in a way that was almost frightening.

They met again on the Riviera a year later.

Discreetly, and as if telling an Oriental fairy tale, she had spoken of the existence of an hereditary secret in her family, smilingly pointing out that the widow of a brilliant, but penniless physician, could not otherwise dress as she dressed.

Other explanations occurred to Sir Bertram at the time, but just when he had been sharpening his wits to deal with this dazzling cocotte, she had disappeared.

It seemed to be a habit of hers.

Now, she was in London. They had met accidentally, or apparently accidentally, and he, anxious to test her, because she was so desirable, had challenged the claims which she had made in France. The challenge, lightly, had been accepted.

The life of Madame Ingomar was a fascinating mystery. Her appointment at a fashionable dance club, made for two o'clock in the morning, was odd. Sir Bertram was in the toils—he knew it; he was prepared to believe that royal blood of China ran in this woman's veins; prepared to believe that she was really the widow of a distinguished physician; but he had no means of testing these claims. One, however—the hereditary secret—he *could* test: it came within his special province. And to-night she had offered him an opportunity.

"My dear Madame Ingomar," he said, and kissed her hand, for his courtly manners were famous throughout Europe. "This is indeed a very great privilege."

The maître d'hôtel led the way to that table which was always reserved for Sir Bertram whenever he required it. Madame Ingomar declined supper, but drank a glass of wine.

Sir Bertram having draped her white fur wrap across the back of her chair, ivory shoulders and perfectly modelled arms were revealed by a gossamer green frock. She smoked almost continuously, not as other women of his acquaintance smoked, but, and it seemed almost a custom of a bygone generation, using a long jade holder.

Her hands were exquisite, her exotic indolence conjured up visions of vanished empires. She talked brilliantly, and Sir Bertram, watching her, decided she was quite the most attractive woman he had ever known. He sighed. He was uncertain of her; and he had reached an age, and a position in the world, when the worst thing that could befall him would be to become laughable.

Madame Ingomar caught his glance, smiled, and held it. Her long, narrow eyes, were brilliantly green. He had never seen such eyes. This was their second meeting since her appearance in London and he had noticed as a man who took an interest in women, that whereas most of those upon the dance floor wore dresses which exposed their backs, in some cases to the waist, Madame Ingomar's frock was of a different pattern.

She had an uncanny trick—it disturbed him—of answering one's unspoken thoughts; and:

"My frock is not quite in the mode," she murmured smilingly—her voice had the most soothing quality of any voice to which he had ever listened—"you wonder why?"

"Really, my dear Madame Ingomar, you embarrass me. Your dress is completely charming—everything about you is perfect."

She placed her cigarette-holder in an ash-tray, glancing swiftly about the room.

"I do not live the sheltered life of other women," she said tensely; "perhaps you would understand me better if you knew something of the things I have suffered."

"What ever do you mean?"

She smiled again, and taking a cigarette from Sir Bertram's open case, fitted it to the jade holder.

"I belong to China," she murmured, lowering her dark lashes, "and in China, women are treated as . . . women."

This was the kind of conversation which at once intrigued and irritated Sir Bertram. It was her hints at some strange, Oriental background into which from time to time she was absorbed, which first had thrown a noose about his interest. But always . . . he doubted.

That she had Chinese blood in her, none could deny. But that she belonged in any other sense to the Far East he was not prepared to admit. These odd references to a mode of life divorced from all ideals of Western culture, were part and parcel with that fabulous story of the hereditary secret.

As Sir Bertram lighted her cigarette, Madame Ingomar glanced up.

Those wonderful eyes held him.

"You have always mistaken me for an adventuress," she said. And the music of her voice, because it was pitched in so curious a key, reached him over the strains of the dance band. "In one way you are right, in another you are very, very wrong. To-night, I hope to convert you."

"Believe me, I require no conversion; I am your most devoted friend."

She touched his hand lightly; her long, slender fingers, with extravagantly varnished nails, communicated to Sir Bertram a current of secret understanding which seemed to pulse through his veins, his nerves, and to reach his brain.

He was in love with this Eurasian witch. Every line and curve of her body, every wave of her dark hair, her voice, the perfume of her personality, intoxicated him.

Silently, he mocked himself:—There is no fool like an old fool.

"You are neither old nor a fool," she said, and slipped slender fingers into his grasp. "You are a clever man whom I admire, very, very much."

He squeezed those patrician fingers almost cruelly, carried away by the magnetism of this woman's intense femininity; so that for fully half a minute the uncanny character of those words did not dawn upon him.

Then, it came crashingly. He drew his hand away—and stared at her.

"Why did you say that?" he asked. He was more than startled; he was frightened. "I did not speak."

"You spoke to *me*," she said, softly. "You understand me a little bit, and so I can hear you—sometimes."

"Good God!"

Madame Ingomar laughed. Her laughter, Sir Bertram thought, was the most deliciously musical which had ever fallen upon his ears.

"In the East," she said, "when we are interested, we know how to get in touch."

He watched her in silence. She had turned her glance away, lolling back in her chair, so that she seemed to emerge like an ivory goddess from the mass of white fur, for she had drawn her wrap about her shoulders. She was watching the dancers, and Sir Bertram saw her as an Oriental empress, watching, almost superciliously, a performance organized for her personal entertainment.

Suddenly, she glanced aside at him.

"I promised that to-night I would prove my words," she said, slowly. "If you wish it, we will go."

Sir Bertram started. She had called him back from a reverie in which he had been a guest at a strange Eastern banquet.

"I am very happy, here, with you," he replied. "But what you wish is what I desire to do."

"Let us go, then. My father has consented to see you."

For anyone to "consent" to see the great Sir Bertram Morgan was a novelty in that gentleman's life. Yet, oddly enough, the phrase did not strike him as insolent, or even curious. One of the greatest powers in the world of finance, he accepted this mysterious summons.

CHAPTER 19

ROWAN HOUSE

Sir Bertram's fawn and silver Rolls, familiar in many of the capitals of Europe, was brought up to the door of the club, and the courtly financier handed his beautiful companion to her seat.

"I warn you, Sir Bertram, we have some distance to go—"

"How far?"

"Fourteen or fifteen miles into Surrey."

"The journey will pass very quickly with you."

"If you will tell your man to go to Sutton By-pass I will direct him when we get there how to find Rowan House."

"Rowan House? Is that where you are going?"

"It's a very old house—a sort of survival. It came on the market some years ago. It was once the property of Sir Lionel Barton, the famous explorer."

"Barton?" Sir Bertram got in beside Madame Ingomar, having given rapid instructions to the chauffeur. "I have met Barton—a madman, but brilliant. He nearly brought about a rising a year or two ago, in Afghanistan, or somewhere, by stealing the ornaments from a prophet's tomb. Is that the man you mean?"

The car started smoothly on its way.

"Yes," said Madame Ingomar, leaning back upon the cushions and glancing in the speaker's direction. "It is the same man. The house was very cheap, but in many ways suitable."

Madame Ingomar turned her head again, staring straight before her, and Sir Bertram, studying that cameo-like profile, groped for some dim memory which it conjured up. Bending forward he pulled down the front blind.

"The lights of approaching cars are so dazzling," he said. "That is more restful."

"Thank you, yes," she murmured. . . .

The big Rolls, all but silently, quite effortlessly, was devouring mile after mile of London highway. The Flying Squad car, close behind, at times was fully extended by the driver to keep track of the quarry. Chief detective-inspector Gallaho had twice removed his hat since they had left Bond Street, on each occasion replacing it at a slightly different angle, which betokened intense excitement. Sterling was silent, as was Nayland Smith. . . .

Madame Ingomar touched Sir Bertram's hand. He raised her fingers to his lips and kissed them rapturously.

"Please, please," she pleaded. "I will not allow you to make love to me, while you doubt me so much. If I did, I should feel like a courtesan."

Sir Bertram drew back, watching her. She dropped her wrap and turned away from him, glancing back over her right shoulder.

"You are a man of honour," she said, the gaze of those magnetic eyes fixed upon him suddenly, overpoweringly. "I need your assistance; but you will never understand me until you know something of the dangers of my life."

She slipped her shoulders free of the green frock. Sir Bertram suppressed an exclamation.

That ivory back was wealed with the marks of a lash!

He stared fascinatedly, fists clenched. With a graceful, almost indolent movement of her slender arms. Madame Ingomar readjusted her dress, pulled her fur wrap about her, and lay back in the corner, watching him under lowered lashes.

"What fiend did that to you?" he muttered. "What devil incarnate could deface that ivory skin?"

He was bending over her, one knee upon the floor of the car, a supplicant, literally at her feet. But she stared straight before her. When he seized her hands, they lay listless in his grasp.

"Tell me!"—the hoarseness of his own voice surprised him: "I want to know—I must know."

"It would be useless," she replied, her tones so low that he could only just catch the words. "In this you *cannot* assist me. But——" she looked down at him, twining her fingers in his—"I wanted you to know that what I have told you of my life is not a lie."

Sir Bertram kissed her hands, kissed her arms, and quite intoxicated by the beauty of this maddening, incomprehensible woman, would have kissed her lips, but a slender hand, two of the fingers jewelled, intervened between his lips and hers.

Gently, she thwarted him, for her half-closed eyes were not unkind.

"Please . . . not yet," she said. "I have told you that you make me feel like a wanton."

Sir Bertram recovered himself. Seated, staring straight ahead, his teeth very tightly clenched, he tried to analyse his emotions.

Was he in the toils of the most talented adventuress who had ever crossed his path? Did these waves of insane passion which from time to time swept him away, mean that where Madame Ingomar was concerned, self-control had gone? If she was what she claimed to be, what were his intentions about her?

He taxed himself—was he prepared to marry her?

Beside him, she remained silent. He was conscious of the strangest urges. Not since his Oxford days had he experienced anything resembling these. Undeterred by that gentle rebuff, he wanted to grasp Madame Ingomar in his arms and silence her protests with kisses. He wanted to demand, as a lover's right, the real explanation of those marks upon her shoulders. He wanted to kill the man who had caused them, and it was his recognition of this homicidal desire which checked, in a measure, the tumult of his brain.

Was it possible, that he, at his age, holding his place in the world, could be driven quite mad by a woman? He wrenched his head aside and looked at her.

She lay back against the cushions. Through half-closed eyes she stared before her abstractedly, and Sir Bertram captured that fugitive memory.

It was the profile of Queen Nefertiti, that exquisite mystery whose portrait by an unknown artist has been the subject of so much dispute.

Deserted streets offered no obstacles to the chauffeur. The outskirts of London reached, the police car behind had great difficulty in keeping Sir Bertram's Rolls in sight.

"I can't make this out at all," growled Gallaho. "Where the devil is she going?"

"I haven't been in this neighbourhood for some time," snapped Nayland Smith. "But it brings back curious memories. It was in an ancient house in a sort of backwater near Sutton, that I first met Sir Lionel Barton."

"The explorer?"

"Yes. He inherited a queer old place somewhere in this neighbourhood. It was the scene of very strange happenings at the beginning of the Fu Manchu case. And . . . by heaven, as I live, that is just the direction we are heading now!"

In the leading car, the blind having been raised again, Madame Ingomar was giving instructions to the chauffeur. And presently, so guided, the Rolls turned into a darkly shadowed avenue which in summer must have been a veritable tunnel. At the end of it, through the temporary clearness of the night, one saw Rowan House, a long, squat building, hemmed in by trees and shrubs.

When presently Sir Bertram found himself in the entrance hall, he recognized the hand of the brilliant, but eccentric explorer and archeologist who had been the former owner of Rowan House. The place was a miniature Assyrian hall, and the present occupier had not disturbed this scheme. Animal skins and one or two exotic rugs alone disturbed the expanse of polished floor; and in the opening hung curtains of some queerly figured material which resembled that represented in ancient wall paintings.

The exterior of the house, Sir Bertram had noted, presented an unpleasantly damp and clammy appearance. And now as he stood looking about him, but glancing from time to time at the Oriental servant who had opened the door, he became aware at once of a curious perfume, almost like that of incense, yet having an overpowering quality about it which gave him the impression that Rowan House was not exactly a healthy abode.

Madame Ingomar was speaking rapidly to the butler who had admitted them, a squat Burman, dressed in white, and possessing an incredible width of shoulder. They spoke in a language which Sir Bertram did not understand.

CHAPTER 20

GOLD

THE ROOM TO WHICH Madame Ingomar presently conducted Sir Bertram was astonishing in many respects.

"I will tell my father you are here," she said—and he found himself alone.

From the lacquer armchair in which he sat, Sir Bertram surveyed his surroundings. He saw a room Orientally elegant, having entrances closed with sliding doors. Two shaded lanterns swung from the ceiling, illuminating the room warmly, and a number of brightly coloured cushions were strewn about the floor. There were tapestries in which red and gold ran riot, so that one lost the head of a dragon and failed to recover it again in endeavouring to trace his tail. Rich carpets and cushioned divans; a number of handsome cabinets containing fine pottery; a battalion of books in unfamiliar bindings arranged upon shelves which, conforming to the scheme of the room, were of dull red lacquer.

At the end remote from that where Sir Bertram sat, in a deep tiled hearth, a small chemical furnace threw its red glow into the room. On a shelf just above this furnace there was a row of jars which contained preserved lizards, snakes and other small reptiles; there was a large table, apparently of Italian workmanship, magnificently inlaid, upon which were some open faded volumes and a number of scientific instruments.

One of the lacquer doors slid noiselessly open and a man came in. Sir Bertram hesitated for a moment and then stood up.

The newcomer was a singularly tall Chinaman who wore a plain yellow robe which accentuated the gaunt lines of his figure. A black cap surmounted by a bead crowned his massive skull. Introductions were superfluous: Sir Bertram Morgan knew that he stood in the presence of the Marquis Chang Hu.

The man radiated authority. He was impressive to a degree exceeding Sir Bertram's experience. Perhaps the similarity of the profile of Madame Ingomar to that of the long-dead, beautiful Egyptian queen subconsciously prompted the image, but Sir Bertram thought, as others had thought before him, that the aged, ageless, majestic face of the man in the yellow robe resembled the face of the Pharaoh Seti I whose power, unexercised for four thousand years, may still be felt by anyone who bends over the glass case in Cairo which contains the mummy of that mighty king.

"You are welcome, Sir Bertram." The tall Chinaman advanced, bowing formally. "Please be seated. I honour my daughter for arranging this interview."

"It is a pleasure to me, too, sir."

Sir Bertram spoke sincerely. He was used to nobilities and to the off-shoots of imperial trees, but this survivor of the royal Manchus was a Prince indeed.

He wondered what he was doing in England. Knowing something of the situation in China, he wondered if the charming and promising adventure with Madame Ingomar had been no more than a lead-up to this; an attempt to enlist him in some hopeless

campaign, financially to readjust the hopeless muddle which had taken the place of the once great Chinese Empire.

The Marquis Chang Hu seated himself behind the Italian table and Sir Bertram dropped back into his armchair. He had never heard a voice quite like that of Chang Hu. It was harsh, but imperious. He spoke perfect English. Long after this strange interview, Sir Bertram recognized that the impressiveness of the Marquis's lightest words was due to one peculiarity:—Sir Bertram was old enough to have heard John Henry Newman speak; and in the diction of this majestic Chinaman he recognized later, the unalloyed beauty of our language as the poet-cardinal had spoken it.

"It is not my wish, Sir Bertram," said his strange host, "to detain you any longer than is necessary."

Sir Bertram's chair was set very near to the big table, and Chang Hu, bending courteously across that glittering expanse, placed an ingot of metal in his visitor's hand.

"You will have observed that I have some small facilities here. If you wish to make any tests, I shall be happy to assist you."

Sir Bertram glanced at the ingot and then looked up. He closed his eyes swiftly. He had met a glance unlike any he had ever known. The eyes of Madame Ingomar were fascinating, hypnotic; the eyes of the Marquis, her father, held a power which was shattering.

Looking down again at the ingot in his hand:

"In the case of a man of my experience," he replied, "tests are unnecessary. This is pure gold."

CHAPTER 21

GALLAHO AND STERLING SET OUT

"STOP!" SNAPPED NAYLAND SMITH through the speaking tube. "Back into that lane we have just passed on the right."

The driver of the C.I.D. car checked immediately, stopped and reversed. There was no trace of fog on this outskirt of London. The night was limpidly clear. The big car was backed into the narrow lane which Nayland Smith had indicated.

"Good," growled Gallaho; "but what's the next move, sir?"

"It's almost certain," said Sterling excitedly, "that this is Dr. Fu Manchu's new base. It's almost certain . . . that Fleurette is here."

"Go easy." Sir Denis grasped his shoulder. "We must think. A mistake, now, would be fatal."

"I am wondering," said Gallaho, "what madness brought Sir Bertram Morgan here to-night?"

"The madness," Smith replied, "which has brought many men to disaster . . . a woman."

"Yes," Gallaho admitted; "she's a good looker. But I should have thought he was getting past it."

"Sir Denis . . ." Sterling's voice trembled. "We're wasting time."

They tumbled out of the car. They had sponged the make-up from their faces, but were still in the matter of dress, two rough-looking citizens. Smith stood there in the dusk of that silent by-way, tugging at the lobe of his left ear; then:

"I am wondering," he murmured. "Including the driver, Gallaho, we are only a party of four. . . ."

"What have you got in mind, sir?"

"I have this in mind. I propose to raid Rowan House."

"While Sir Bertram Morgan is there?"

"Yes. Unless he comes out very soon."

"You think. . . ?"

"I think nothing. I know. Dr. Fu Manchu is in that house! If Sir Bertram is in danger or not I cannot say, but the man we want is there. I take it you have the warrant in your pocket, Inspector?"

Chief detective-inspector Gallaho coughed loudly.

"You may take it that I have, sir," he replied.

Nayland Smith grasped his arm in the darkness.

"I didn't mean what you're thinking, Inspector," he said, "but we are so tied by red tape that any absurd formality overlooked might mean the wreck of the case."

Gallaho replied almost apologetically.

“Thank you, sir; I entirely agree with you. Perhaps I was rather forgetting the fact that you have suffered from red tape as much as I have. But I take it you mean, sir, that we may meet with opposition.”

Sterling, clenching and unclenching his fists, was walking up and down in a fever of excitement, and;

“Sir Denis!” he exclaimed, “why are we delaying? Surely, with a woman’s life at stake . . . ?”

“Listen, Sterling,” snapped Sir Denis. “I understand and sympathize—but I’m in charge of this party, and you belong to it.”

“I am sorry,” said Sterling hoarsely.

The driver of the car, seated at the wheel, was watching the trio expectantly, and then:

“Listen, Gallaho,” said Nayland Smith, rapidly: “how far are we from a call-box?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know, sir. This is rather outside my area. Do you know?” addressing his question to the driver.

“No, sir. The last one we passed was at the crossroads.”

“Drive back,” Nayland Smith instructed. “It’s your job to put a call through to local headquarters.”

“Very good, sir.”

“I want a raid squad here within twenty minutes. When you know where to go, drive there to pick ’em up.”

“Very good, sir.”

Silently and smoothly the big car moved out of the lane.

“In moments of excitement,” said Nayland Smith, “I am afraid I relapse into Indian police terms. Do you think your man can manage it, Gallaho?”

“Certainly, sir.” Gallaho replied. “The Flying Squad’s pretty efficient. We shall have all the men you want inside twenty minutes.”

“My fault,” said Nayland Smith, “not to have had a radio car.”

“They’re all on duty, sir.”

“One could have been recalled. We had time.”

“What now, sir?”

“We must look for vulnerable points, and keep well under cover. I don’t want Sir Bertram’s driver to see us. I trust nobody where Dr. Fu Manchu is concerned. Come on!”

He led the way towards the tree-shadowed drive of Rowan House. Their cautious footsteps seemed loudly to disturb the damp silence of the avenue, but they pressed on till the lights of Sir Bertram’s Rolls, drawn up before the porch of the squat residence, brought them to a halt.

“Sterling!” Nayland Smith’s voice was low, but urgent. “Through the shrubbery here, and right around that wing on the left. You are looking for a way in, preferably a French window, of course. But any point where an entrance can be made quickly. If you meet anybody, tackle him, and then sing out. Are you armed?”

“Yes; it’s become a habit since I met Dr. Fu Manchu.”

“Good. Walk right around the house until you meet Gallaho, then return by the more convenient route, and this point is to be our meeting place. And now, you, Gallaho, stick to the shadow of that lawn, there, and work around the right of the house till you meet Sterling. I am going to direct my attention to obtaining a glimpse of Sir Bertram’s chauffeur. His appearance and behaviour will tell me much. We meet here in five minutes.”

Gallaho and Sterling set out.

CHAPTER 22

GALLAHO RUNS

CHIEF DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR GALLAHO started his voyage of exploration under conditions rather more difficult than those which confronted Sterling.

The west wing of the house was closely invested by shrubbery; and although there were a number of windows, some of which were lighted, it was impossible to approach near enough to take advantage of any chink in the curtains. Some of the shrubs, which were of varieties unfamiliar to the inspector, remained in full leaf, others displayed flowers; and there was a damp, sweet, but slightly miasmatic smell about the place.

He remembered that the house had belonged for some years to the eccentric explorer, archeologist and author, Sir Lionel Barton. No doubt this freak vegetation had been imported by him. Gallaho, who was no floriculturist, did not quite approve of shrubs which flowered in mid-winter.

Pressing on, walking on wet grass, he presently reached a gate in a wall which threatened to terminate his journey. He tried the gate—it was unlocked; he opened it. It communicated with a paved yard. Out-buildings indicated that this had formerly been the stables of Rowan House.

Gallaho stood still, looking about him suspiciously.

He was satisfied that no horses were kept; the place was very silent. In the windows of the main building visible from where he stood, no light showed. This was not surprising at such an hour in the morning. The domestic staff might be expected to have retired. It was the sort of place, however, in which an experienced man expected to meet a watch-dog.

Gallaho, holding the door ajar, assured himself that there was no dog, before proceeding across the yard. He examined doors and windows, and came out presently into a neglected garden. He pulled up to take his bearings.

From somewhere a long way off came the wail of a train whistle; and . . . was that a muffled crash?

He had made a half-circuit of the house, which was not large. Sterling should have met him at about this point.

Gallaho stood still, listening.

Except for that vague murmuring which makes London audible for twenty miles beyond the city's boundaries, the night was still.

It was very queer.

Gallaho had noted that all windows in the domestic quarters were fastened. The ideal point of entrance had not presented itself. He pushed on. What had become of Sterling?

Weed-grown flower beds bordered the wall of the house. There was nothing of interest to tempt him to approach nearer.

Suddenly, he stopped, fists clenched.

Somewhere—somewhere inside the house, he thought . . . a woman had screamed!

He began to run. He ran in the direction of an out-jutting wing. It was very dark here, but Gallaho found gravel beneath his feet. He raced around the abutment and found himself staring at a French window.

There was no light in the room to which it belonged. Gallaho could see that heavy curtains were drawn. But there was no indication that the interior was illuminated. Nevertheless—from that room the cry might well have come.

He ran forward.

His first discovery was a dramatic one. A glass pane immediately above the lock had been shattered!

The absence of Sterling was now becoming inexplicable. Gallaho could only suppose that he had made some discovery which he had felt to be of such importance as to justify his returning and reporting to Sir Denis. Otherwise, palpably they must have met some considerable time before this.

Gallaho slipped his hand through the opening in the glass, encountering velvet draperies, groped about and found the lock.

There was no key in it.

Yet there was something very sinister about this broken window—that dim scream.

Searching his memory, he seemed to recall that at one point in his fruitless journey, just after he had crossed the stable yard, at about the same time that a distant train whistle had disturbed the silence, he had imagined that he heard a muffled crash. Here, perhaps, was the explanation.

But where was Sterling?

He ran on to the corner of this wing of the house; and now, through close growing but leafless trees, could see the tunnel-like drive along which they had come. Sterling was not in sight, nor could he see Sir Denis. . . .

CHAPTER 23

FLEURETTE

ALAN STERLING was fully alive to the selfishness of his own motives. Nayland Smith was working for the welfare of humanity, striving to defend what we call Civilization from the menace which Dr. Fu Manchu represented. Gallaho officially assisted him. But he, Sterling, hard though he might fight to thrust personal interest into the background, to seek the same goal, knew in his heart that his present objective was the rescue of Fleurette—if she lived—from the clutches of the Chinese doctor.

Through long days and all but unendurable hours of sleepless nights, since the message of Dr. Petrie, her father, had reached him, he had known this yearning for the truth, dreadful though the truth might be. Was she dead or alive? If alive, to what condition of mindless slavery—to what living death—had she been subjected by the brilliant devilish master of her destiny?

He forced his way through damp shrubbery; thorny bushes obstructed his path. He was anxious to avoid making any unnecessary noise. Frequently he glanced towards the porch of Rowan House, before which the long, lithe outline of Sir Bertram's Rolls glittered dimly in reflected light. The headlamps had been turned off, but the sleek body was clearly visible.

Scratches were not to be avoided. At last he was clear of the shrubbery, and found himself upon the damp soil of a flower-bed. He ploughed forward, aiming for a dimly seen path, reached it and felt hard gravel beneath his feet. He was now out of sight from the porch. Glancing back swiftly, he crossed the path and found himself in shelter from the point of view of anyone watching from the front of the house.

He became aware of an oppressive, sickly sweet perfume. He saw a long, dead wall upon which some kind of creeper grew, despite the wintry season, bearing small yellow flowers. Heavy of limb, it climbed almost to the eaves of this wing of Rowan House.

One dark window he saw, high above his head, marked it, but knew that it could only be reached by means of a ladder. He pressed on.

In all directions vegetation hemmed the place in; until, through a chink in heavy curtains drawn behind a French window having small, leaded panes, a spear of light shot across the damp gravel path, revealing many weeds, and was lost in shadowy shrubbery. Sterling crept forward cautiously, step by step, until at last he could peer into the room to which this French window belonged.

He found himself looking into a sort of small library. At first, all that he could see was shelf upon shelf laden with faded, well-worn volumes. Cautiously, he moved nearer to the pane, and now was able to enlarge his field of vision.

Intensely he was excited, so excited that he distrusted himself. He was breathing rapidly.

He saw more bookshelves, and, craning his neck still further, saw a floor plainly carpeted. There was little furniture in the place. He could not see the source of the

illumination: he could see books, books, books; one or two Oriental ornaments; a coffee table with an open volume upon it; and a number of cushions.

A shadow fell across the carpet.

Sterling watched intently, fists clenched.

The shadow grew more dense, shortened—and then the person who occasioned it walked slowly into view, head lowered in the act of reading a small, very faded-looking volume.

It was Fleurette—*his* Fleurette! Petrie's daughter! Sterling experienced a wave of exultation which swept everything else from his mind. Nayland Smith's instructions were forgotten—the chief purpose of the expedition, the apprehension of Dr. Fu Manchu, was forgotten . . . Fleurette was alive—only a few panes of glass separated them.

And how beautiful she was!

The hidden light, gleaming upon her wonderful hair, made it glow and shimmer in living loveliness. She was so slender—so divinely graceful; that rarest creation of nature, as the Chinese doctor had once declared, a perfect woman.

He rapped urgently upon the window.

Fleurette turned. The book dropped from her hand. Her eyes, opened widely, were fixed upon the gap in the curtains.

Sterling's heart was beating wildly as he pressed his face upon the glass. Surely in the light shining out from the room she could see him?

But she stood motionless, startled, gazing, but giving no sign.

"Fleurette!" Sterling spoke in a low voice, yet loudly enough for the girl in the room to hear him. "It's Alan. Open the window, darling—open the window!"

But she gave no sign.

"Fleurette! Can you hear me? It's Alan. Open the window."

He had found the handle. The strangeness of his reception by this girl who only a few days before had lain trembling in his arms because three or four weeks of separation pended, was damping that glad exultation, chilling the hot blood dancing through his veins.

The window was locked, as he had assumed it would be. He could see the key inside.

"Fleurette, darling! For God's sake open the window. Let me in. Don't you understand? It's Alan! It's Alan!"

Fleurette shook her head, and turning, walked across the room.

Surely she had recognized him? In spite of his rough dress, could Fleurette, his Fleurette, *fail* to recognize him?

Pressing his face against the glass, Sterling, astounded, saw her take up a pencil and a writing-block from a dimly seen bureau. He could endure no more. Premature action might jeopardize the success of Nayland Smith's plans, but there were definite limits to Sterling's powers of endurance. These had been reached.

Stepping back a pace he raised his right foot, and crashed the heel of his shoe through the small leaded pane of glass just above the lock of the French window.

He had expected an echoing crash; in point of fact the sound made was staccato and oddly muffled. He paused for a second to listen . . . Somewhere in the distance a train whistle shrieked . . .

Thrusting his hand through the jagged opening, he turned the key, pushed the French window open and stepped into the room. Three swift strides and he had Fleurette in his arms.

She had turned at the crash of his entrance—eyes widely opened, and a look of fear upon her beautiful face.

"My darling, my darling!"—he crushed her against him and kissed her breathlessly. "What has happened? Where have you been? Above all, why didn't you open the window?"

Fleurette's eyes seemed to be looking through him—beyond him—at some far distant object. She made a grimace of pain—good God! of *contempt*. Leaning back, continuing to look not at him, but through him, and wrenching one arm free, she brushed it across her lips as if something loathsome had touched them!

Sterling released her.

He had read of one's heart growing cold, but was not aware that such a phenomenon could actually occur. Where there had been mystery—there was mystery no more. Fleurette's love for him was dead. Something had killed it.

With a tiny handkerchief she was wiping her lips, watching him, watching him all the time. There was absolute silence in the room, and absolute silence outside. He found time to wonder if Gallaho had heard the crash, if those inside the house had heard it.

But this thought was a mere undercurrent.

All of him that was real, all of him that lived, was concentrated upon Fleurette. And now, looking him up and down, with a glance of such scornful anger as he had never sustained in his life from man or woman:

"You are just a common blackguard, then?" she said, in that musical voice which he adored, and yet again raised the fragment of cambric to her lips. "I hate you for this."

"Fleurette, darling!"

His own voice was flat and toneless.

"If you ever had a right to call me Fleurette, you have that right no longer."

Her scorn was like a lash. Alan Sterling writhed under it. But although she stared straightly at him, he could not arrest that strange, far-away gaze. She turned suddenly, and walked towards the bureau. Over her shoulder:

"Get out!" she said, "I am going to call the servants, but I will give you this chance."

"Fleurette, dear!" he extended his arms distractedly. "My darling! what has happened? what wrong have I done?"

He followed her, but she turned and waved him away, fiercely.

“Leave me alone!” she cried, her eyes flashing murderously. “If you touch me again, you will regret it.”

She picked up a pencil and began to write.

Sterling, quivering in muscle and nerve, stood close beside her. Whoever had interfered between himself and Fleurette, upon one point he was determined. She should not remain here, in this house. Explanations could come later. But he proposed to pick her up, regardless of protests, and carry her out to the police car.

Slowly he moved nearer, making up his mind just how he should seize her. There was a silk-shaded lamp on the bureau and in its light he was able quite clearly to read the words which Fleurette was writing upon the pad.

As he read, he stood stock still, touched by a sort of supernatural horror. This is what he read:—

> “*Alan darling. If you touch me I shall try to kill you. If I speak to you I shall tell you I hate you. But I can write my real thoughts. Save me, darling! Save me! . . .*”

Came a flash of inspiration—Alan Sterling understood.

Fleurette was the victim of some devilish device of the Chinese physician. He had induced in her either by drugs or suggestion, a complete revulsion of feeling in regard to those she had formerly loved. But because of some subtlety of the human brain which he had overlooked, although, as in some cases of amnesia, she could not express her real thoughts in words, she could express them in *writing*!

“My darling!”

Sterling bent forward and tore the page from the writing-block.

Whereupon Fleurette turned, her face contorted.

“Don’t touch me! I detest you!”—she glared at him venomously; “I detest you!”

Sterling stooped, threw his left arm around her waist and his right under her knees. He lifted her. She screamed wildly and struck at him.

He forced her head down upon his shoulder to stifle her cries, and carried her towards the open window. . . .

CHAPTER 24

THE LACQUER ROOM

GALLAHO by now very breathless pulled up, watching the porch of Rowan House.

The front door was open; this dimly, he could divine; but there seemed to be no light in the entrance hall.

The headlamps of Sir Bertram's Rolls gleamed dimly, but the inside lights were turned off. Evidently, Sir Bertram was leaving—after a very brief visit.

Why was there no light in the entrance hall?

Gallaho's bewilderment was growing by leaps and bounds. To the problems of the scream, the broken window and Sterling's absence now was added that of Sir Denis's disappearance. Gallaho's own inclination, for he was a man of forthright action, was to run up the drive quite openly to the porch, and to demand to see the occupier of the house.

But Sir Denis was in charge to-night. He could not act without his authority, and his last instruction had been: "Do nothing, until I give the word."

Between them, Gallaho thought bitterly, they were likely to make a mess of things.

A muted bang told him that the door of Sir Bertram's car had been closed. Who had entered it he didn't know. Suddenly the headlights cleaved a lane through darkness, illuminating the gravel drive, depicting trees of elfin shapes in silhouette, goblin trees. The entrance to Rowan House was transformed magically into a haunted forest.

The Rolls moved off, turned, and entered the drive. Gallaho darted half right into the shrubbery, crouched down, and watched. . . .

Someone was seated beside the chauffeur. The fleeting impression which Gallaho derived conveyed to his mind the idea of a native servant of some kind. This surely meant that Sir Bertram was not returning home, but was proceeding elsewhere?

And there was no means of following! The Flying Squad car was presumably at the local police station, picking up a party of men to raid Rowan House!

The Rolls purred swiftly by. Of its occupants, Gallaho had never a glimpse. But as it passed he sprang to his feet and stepped out on to the drive.

"Where in hell has everybody got to?" he growled.

The door of the house was open. He could see the black gap which it made in the dingy grey frontage of the pillared porch. Something very strange was happening here—had already happened; and now:

"Gallaho!" came a distant voice, "Gallaho!"

It was Nayland Smith!

"Where are you, sir?" Gallaho shouted.

He raced towards the porch of the house from which the cry had seemed to come, throwing precaution to the winds now, for there was urgency in Nayland Smith's voice.

And as he reached the steps he saw him. . . .

Sir Denis was standing in the open doorway, the lobby behind him in darkness.

"He's slipped us, I think, Gallaho. We're too late. But my main concern at the moment is not with him. . . . show a light here. I am looking for the switch."

Gallaho's torch flashed in the darkness of that strange Assyrian hall.

"There it is, sir."

The lights were switched on. It was a queer looking place, of pillars and bas-reliefs, a freak of the former eccentric owner of Rowan House. There was no sound. They might have been alone in the building.

"What the devil has become of Mr. Sterling?" Gallaho's face looked very lined and grim. "And I thought I heard a woman scream."

"I *did* hear a woman scream," snapped Smith. "I started around the house in the direction you had taken. Did you notice a door in a sort of archway which opens into the stable yard?"

"Yes, it was locked."

"Not when I reached it," Smith replied grimly. "I went in, venturing to use my torch. It communicated with an absolutely unfurnished passage, which I followed, and found myself here, looking out of the open front door—just as Sir Bertram's car disappeared down the drive. Ssh! What's that?"

From somewhere within the recesses of the silent house, a faint sound of movement had come. . . .

Slowly and with extreme caution, in order not to rattle the rings, Inspector Gallaho drew aside a curiously patterned curtain which hung in one of the square openings of the Assyrian hall. It was from behind this curtain that the slight sound had come.

A thickly carpeted passage appeared, dimly lighted. There was a door at the further end immediately facing them and one to the right. That at the further end—apparently a sliding door—was ajar . . . and light shone out from the room beyond.

Nayland Smith exchanged a significant glance with the detective, and the two tip-toed along the corridor. Their footsteps made next to no sound upon the thick carpet. Outside the door, both paused, listening.

In the room beyond, someone was walking up and down, restlessly, ceaselessly.

Gallaho displayed an automatic in his open palm. Smith nodded, and drew the door open.

He found himself in a fairly large room which was a combination of a library and a laboratory. It was a type of room with which he had become familiar during the long years that he had battled with Dr. Fu Manchu. There were preserved snakes and reptiles in jars upon a high shelf. Many queer looking volumes in orderly rows appeared behind a big table upon which, in addition to evidences of literary activity, there was a certain amount of chemical paraphernalia. Lacquer was the dominant note.

At the moment of Nayland Smith's entrance, the man who had been promenading the room turned, startled, and stared at the intruders.

It was Sir Bertram Morgan, Governor of the Bank of England.

"Well I'm damned!"—the growling words came from Gallaho.

"Sir Bertram!" Nayland Smith exclaimed.

Sir Bertram Morgan experienced a not unnatural difficulty in recognizing Smith, whom he had met socially, in his present attire; but at last:

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith, I believe?" he replied. The financier had quite recovered his poise. He was a man of remarkably cool nerve. "The Marquis Chang Hu did not inform me that I should have the pleasure of meeting you here to-night."

Gallaho exchanged glances with Sir Denis and then stood by the open door, listening—listening for the Scotland Yard car and the raiding party. Sir Denis twitched at the lobe of his ear, staring all about him, and then:

"I fear, Sir Bertram," he said, "that you have been decoyed here under false pretences."

"Decoyed . . . ?"

Sir Bertram assumed his well-known expression which has appeared in so many Press photographs, his bushy eyebrows slightly raised in the centre.

"I said 'decoyed' advisedly. You came with a woman. She is half Chinese. By what name you know her I cannot say. I have known her by several."

"Indeed! You probably refer to Madame Ingomar?"

Nayland Smith smiled, but without mirth.

"Fah Lo Suee's invention is failing her," he murmured; "that was the name in which she crept into the good graces of Sir Lionel Barton in Egypt three years ago. However, all this is beside the point. You have taken a very grave risk, Sir Bertram."

The banker, unused to that brusque mode of address which characterised Nayland Smith in moments of tension, stared rather coldly.

"Your meaning is not clear to me," he replied. "I was invited to this house to discuss what I may term a purely professional matter with the Marquis Chang Hu."

"Chang Hu? Will you describe Chang Hu?"

Sir Bertram was becoming definitely offended with Nayland Smith, largely because the latter's force was beating him down.

"A tall, distinguished Chinese aristocrat," he replied quietly.

"Correct. He is tall, he is distinguished, and he *is* an aristocrat. Pray proceed."

"A member of a former Royal House of China."

"Correct. He is."

"A man, roughly, sixty years of age."

"Say a hundred and sixty," snapped Nayland Smith, "and you may be rather nearer the mark! However, I quite understand, Sir Bertram. May I ask you briefly to outline what occurred?"

"Certainly." Sir Bertram leaned against a bookcase which contained works exclusively Chinese in character. "I met the marquis by appointment. His daughter, Madame Ingomar, had informed me (frankly, I didn't believe her) that her father, an advanced student of mineralogy, had perfected a system for the transmutation of gold. I know something of gold . . ."

"You *should*," Nayland Smith murmured.

But his smile was so disarming—it was that delightfully ingenuous smile which so rarely relieved the ruggedness of his features—that no man seeing it could have held antagonism.

Sir Bertram was mollified. He smiled in return.

"To-night," he went on impressively, and pointed to the big table, "an ingot of gold was offered to me by the Marquis Chang Hu, together with the assurance that he was prepared to supply any quantity up to three hundred-weights in the course of the next few weeks!"

"What!"

"Sst!"

Gallaho at the open door had raised his hand in warning.

"Listen!"

The purr of an approaching car became audible.

"It's Markham with the police," said Gallaho.

He ran out.

Nayland Smith was staring curiously at Sir Bertram.

"It was pure gold?"

"Pure gold."

"He claimed to be able to make gold," murmured Smith. "I wonder . . . I wonder. May I ask, Sir Bertram, how the interview terminated?"

"Certainly. Madame Ingomar, my host's daughter, called out from somewhere in the house. The door was closed, and her cry was somewhat indistinct, but her father, naturally, was disturbed."

"Naturally."

"He excused himself and went to see what had occurred, begging me to remain here."

"He took the ingot of gold?"

"Apparently he did."

"He closed the door behind him?"

"He did. I opened it recently, beginning to wonder what had become of the marquis."

"It may surprise you to learn, Sir Bertram," said Nayland Smith quietly, "that only three or at the outside four of the rooms in Rowan House are furnished."

"What!"

"It was a plot. But by a miracle the plotters have been tricked. I regret to say that this is not the worst. I don't know all the truth, yet, but when the police arrive, I hope to learn it."

Detective-inspector Gallaho appeared in the open doorway, Sir Bertram's chauffeur at his heels.

"Preston!" Sir Bertram exclaimed—"what's this?"

"A very nasty business, sir, if I may say so," the man replied.

He was an obvious ex-Service man, clean limbed and of decent mentality. His hazel eyes were very angry and his fists clenched.

"Tell me," Sir Bertram directed, tersely.

"Well, sir," Preston went on, looking from face to face, "that Burmese butler who opened the door when we arrived, you remember, came out about ten minutes ago, and I naturally thought you were leaving. As I went up to him in the dark he jabbed a pistol in my ribs, and invited me to jump to the wheel. I am sorry, sir, but I did it. . . ."

"Don't blame you," growled Gallaho.

"Several people got into the car, sir. I had an impression that one was *carried* in. Then, the coloured swine beside me gave the order to go."

"Where did you go to?" asked Nayland Smith.

"To an old mews not three miles from here, sir, where I was told to pull up—and I pulled up. This blasted Burman sat with his gun in my ribs the whole time that the party in the car were getting out. But I had my eye on the reflector and I think there were two women and two men."

"Any idea of their appearance?" Smith demanded.

"Not the slightest, sir. It was very dark. I'm not sure, even, of their number. But one of the men was very sick, the others seemed to drag him out of the car."

The roar of the powerful engine of the Flying Squad proclaimed itself; voices were heard.

"Here they are!" said Gallaho.

"Quick!" Sir Denis directed Preston: "What happened then?"

"The Burman jumped off, keeping me under cover. He told me to drive back. I couldn't think of anything else to do, sir."

Uniformed police were pouring into Rowan House.

CHAPTER 25

CURARI

"NOTHING HERE!" declared Nayland Smith.

They had searched every foot of the deserted mews.

"A sort of cache?" suggested Sir Bertram Morgan, who had accompanied them, now keenly interested in their quest. "No doubt they kept a car here."

"There's evidence that they did," said Gallaho. "And we'll know more about it to-morrow. But in the meantime," he turned to Sir Denis, "what's the next move, sir?"

Rowan House had proved to be a mere shell, a mockery: the greater part of it unfurnished. The library in Rowan House in which Dr. Fu Manchu had received Sir Bertram, and the corridor leading to it from the Assyrian hall, were the only properly furnished parts of the place. There was a small writing-room on the other side of the house, the glass in the French window of which had been smashed, containing a number of bookshelves, a bureau and one or two other odds and ends. But with the exception of fragmentary belongings of the former tenant, the eccentric Sir Lionel Barton, the place was unfurnished from floor to attic—nor was there a soul in it, although the police had searched it foot by foot.

The property had been sold by Sir Lionel Barton, but the last tenant had left nearly a year before. The books and some of the ornaments in the two furnished rooms, unreadable volumes in Sanskrit, Chinese and Persian, had been left behind by the outgoing tenant as they had been left behind by Sir Lionel. The Chinese library, with its sliding doors and lacquer fittings, had been a feature of Rowan House during the time that Barton had occupied it. The place had been baited for the evening; a mouse-trap. The caretaker had vanished.

"They've got Sterling!" groaned Nayland Smith. "God knows why they've taken him—but they've got him!"

Sir Bertram was now keenly interested, tuned up for the hunt; his sentiments in regard to Madame Ingomar had undergone a definite change, yet he knew in his heart, although he could not doubt the assurance of the ex-Assistant Commissioner, that if she beckoned to him again—he would follow. . . .

He wondered how far he would go, to what extent he would fall under the influence of those magnetic eyes, that compelling voice. He shuddered. Perhaps he had had a nearer escape than he realized. But the gold had been . . . *gold*.

The raiding party returned to the depôt in the Yard car, and Sir Denis and Chief detective-inspector Gallaho accepted a lift home in Sir Bertram Morgan's Rolls.

Fog met them in the London suburbs . . .

It was at some hour not far removed from that when dawn should have been breaking over London, that Nayland Smith prepared a whisky and soda for Gallaho and passing it to him raised his glass silently.

"I know sir," said Gallaho; "it's been a very bad show for us to-night."

“A bad show all along,” snapped Sir Denis. “Cramped, trammelled, cut off from his resources, Fu Manchu is *still powerful*. First, he gets Petrie’s daughter, a wonderful hostage, by one of the most amazing tricks in my experience. He smuggles her into England. And now . . .”

“That’s the devil of it, sir.”

“The devil indeed. He’s got Sterling.”

“Dead or alive?”

“Since he is a friend and a first-class type of man (I have worked with him in the past) I prefer to think, Inspector—alive. I doubt if Dr. Fu Manchu would burden himself with——”

“A corpse?”

“A corpse, yes.”

Nayland Smith’s gaze became abstracted, and plucking at his ear, he crossed the room and pulled a heavy curtain aside, gazing out upon the foggy Embankment.

There came a rap on the door.

“Come in!”

Fey entered, despite the approach of dawn, immaculate and unperturbed. Nayland Smith was still holding the heavy curtain aside, and:

“Have you noticed the window, sir?” Fey asked.

“No.”

Nayland Smith turned, and examined the window.

“By gad!” he rapped.

There was a neat, but slightly jagged hole an inch in circumference in one of the panes! He closed the curtains, and faced Fey. Gallaho, glass in hand, was staring from man to man.

“While I was walking up and down, sir.” Fey went on coolly, “as you told me to do, earlier to-night, or rather, last night, sir, *this* came through the window—missed me by no more than an inch.”

He handed a small feathered dart to Nayland Smith.

The latter stepped to a lamp and examined it closely.

“Gallaho,” he said, “I should say that this thing had been fired from an air gun. But examine the point.”

The Scotland Yard man came forward, eagerly bending over the table.

“It seems to be covered in gum.”

“I won’t say *curari*, but a very brief analysis will settle the point. The cornered rat is showing his teeth . . . and they are poisoned teeth.”

CHAPTER 26

DR. FU MANCHU

Alan Sterling looked around the cellar in which he lay.

It was brick-paved; its roof was formed by half an arch. There was a very stout looking door in the corner opposite that in which he found himself. An unshaded electric bulb hung on a piece of flexible cable from the roof. He could trace the cable down the sloping brickwork to a roughly hollowed gap through which it disappeared.

There was no furniture of any kind in the cellar, but the place was singularly hot, and it seemed to be informed by a ceaseless buzzing which, however, presently he identified with his own skull.

He had an agonizing headache. Raising his hand, he found a great lump immediately above his left ear.

The first idea which flashed through his bemused mind was a message of thanksgiving. He must have had a very narrow escape from death. Then came memories—chaotic, torturing.

He had had Fleurette in his arms: then, something had happened.

What had happened?

It was beyond him. He could recall nothing but the fact that she had screamed unnaturally, that he had struggled with her. Then there was a gap, and now . . . where was this place in which he found himself? Where had he been when he had struggled with Fleurette?

He clutched his throbbing skull, trying to force thought. Memories began to return to him in fragments; then, as a complete story.

He tried to stand up. The effort was too much for his strength. He dropped back again upon the stone pavement. By God! He had had a devil of a whack! Gingerly he touched the swelling on his skull, leaning back against the wall and still trying to think.

Fleurette was alive—thank God for that! But in some way, she had changed towards him. He was not quite clear about it. But for this he must be thankful: that she, whom he had thought was dead—was alive. The minor difficulty, no doubt, would resolve itself.

Nayland Smith! Of course! He had been with Nayland Smith! . . . And Gallaho? What had become of Gallaho?

Above all—where was he? where was this unfurnished cellar located? He made another attempt to stand up; but it was not entirely successful. He was anxious to find out if that heavy door was locked, or bolted. But the journey, one of four paces, was too much for him.

He sank down on to the floor again, leaning back against the wall. The throbbing in his head was all but unendurable, and the heat was stifling—unless, like the buzzing, due to internal conditions.

Separate now from that buzzing which he knew to belong to his injured skull, Sterling became aware of a muted roaring sound. It was somewhere beneath his feet. It

was uncanny; when first he accepted the reality of its existence, he was dismayed; for what could it be? From where could it come?

He was about to make a third attempt to stand up, when the heavy door opened.

A very tall, gaunt man stood in the opening, looking at him. He wore a long, white linen coat, linen trousers, and white rubber-soled shoes. The coat, tunic fashion, was buttoned to his neck—a lean, sinewy neck supporting a head which might have been that of Dante.

The brow was even finer than the traditional portraits of Shakespeare, crowned with scanty, neutral coloured hair. The face of the white-clad man was a wonderful face, and might once have been beautiful. It was that of a man of indeterminable age, heavily lined, but lighted by a pair of such long, narrow, brilliant green eyes that one's thoughts flashed to Satan—Lucifer, Son of the Morning: an angel, but a fallen angel. His slender hands, with long, polished nails, were clasped before him. Although no trace of expression crossed that extraordinary face, perhaps a close observer watching the green eyes might have said that the man motionless in the doorway was surprised.

Alan Sterling succeeded in his third attempt to stand up. He was very unsteady, but by means of supporting himself against the wall with his left hand, he succeeded in remaining upright.

So standing, he faced Dr. Fu Manchu.

"The fact that you are alive——" the words came sibilantly from thin lips which scarcely seemed to move—"surprises me."

Sterling stared at the speaker. Every instinct in his mind, his body, his soul, prompted: "Kill him! Kill him!" But Sterling knew something of Dr. Fu Manchu, and he knew that he must temporize.

"I am surprised, too," he said.

His voice shook, and he hated his weakness.

The green eyes watched him hypnotically. Sterling, leaning against the wall, wrenched his gaze away.

"It is not my custom," the harsh voice continued, "to employ coarse methods. You were, to put it bluntly, bludgeoned in Rowan House. Your constitution, Alan Sterling, must resemble that of a weazel. I had intended to incinerate your body. I am not displeased to find that life survives."

"Nor am I," said Sterling, calculating his chances of a swift spring, and a blow over the heart of this Chinese fiend whom he knew to be of incalculable age; then a hook to that angular jaw—and a way to freedom would be open.

With the instinct of a boxer he had been watching the green eyes whilst these thoughts had flashed through his mind, and now:

"You could not strike me over the heart," said Dr. Fu Manchu; "I am trained in more subtle arts than the crudities of boxing have ever appreciated. As to your second blow, aimed, I believe, at my jaw, this would not occur—you would be disabled."

For a moment, a long moment, Alan Sterling hesitated; in fact, until the uncanny quality of these words had penetrated to his brain. Then he realized, as others had realized before him, that Dr. Fu Manchu had been reading his thoughts. He stood quite

still; he was recovering from the effects of the assault which had terminated his memories of Rowan House, and now was capable of standing unsupported.

"There is a monastery in Thibet," the cold voice proceeded; "it is called Rachë Churân. Those who have studied under the masters of Rachë Churân have nothing to fear from Western violence. Forget your projects. Rejoice only that you live—if you value life."

CHAPTER 27

THE PIT AND THE FURNACE

Alan Sterling stood upon a wooden platform, clutching a rusty iron rail and looking down upon a scene which reminded him of nothing so much as an illustration of Dante's *Inferno*.

Dim figures, inhuman, strangely muffled like animated Egyptian mummies, moved far below. Sometimes they were revealed when the door of some kind of furnace was opened, to disappear again like phantom forms of a nightmare, when the door was closed. A stifling heat rose from the pit.

"The simile of a mummy has occurred to you," said the voice of Dr. Fu Manchu out of the darkness, that strange voice which stressed gutturals and lent to sibilants a quality rarely heard in the voice of an English speaker. "You are ignorant of Ancient Egyptian ritual, or other images would occur to you. In point of fact, these workers are protected against the poisonous fumes generated at certain points in the experiment now taking place below. These gases do not reach us here. They are consumed by a simple process and dispersed by means of a ventilation shaft. Pray continue to descend."

Sterling, clutching the rusty iron rail, went down more wooden steps.

To some degree he was regaining mastery of himself, but his brain failed to suggest any plan of action other than to accept the orders of the uncanny being into whose power, once again, he had fallen. Something which Nayland Smith had said, long, long ago—he was quite unable to recall when—came buzzing through his brain like a sort of refrain:

"Behind a house which we have passed a hundred times, over a hill which we have looked at every morning for months together, on the roof of a building in which we have lived, beneath a pavement upon which we walk daily, there are secret things which we don't even suspect. Dr. Fu Manchu has made it his business to seek out these secret things. . . ."

Here was the theory demonstrated! He was in a trap: he hadn't the remotest idea where he was. This ghastly place might be anywhere within a fifty mile radius of the house in Surrey. He must wait for a suitable opening; try to plan ahead.

He went on down the steps; the heat grew greater and greater. Dr. Fu Manchu followed him.

"Stop!" the harsh voice directed.

And Sterling stopped.

One thing there was which gave him power to control his emotion, which gave him strength to temporize, patience to wait: Fleurette was alive!

Some wizardry of the Chinese physician had perverted her outlook. He, Sterling, had seen such cases before in households belonging to Dr. Fu Manchu. The man's knowledge was stupendous—he could play upon the strongest personality as a musician plays upon an instrument in an orchestra.

"You will presently observe something phenomenal," the high voice continued, "something which has not occurred for several centuries. The mating of the elements. At the moment of transmutation, the fumes to which I have referred escape to a certain extent from the furnace."

Sterling paused, looking down into the hot darkness.

"My facilities here are limited," Dr. Fu Manchu continued, "and I am using primitive methods. I am cut off from my once great resources—to a certain extent by the activities of your *friend*——" he stressed the word, speaking it upon a very high note—"Sir Denis Nayland Smith. But it is possible to light a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together, if your burning glass is absent or if one has no matches. The work is about to complete itself——" his voice rose to a key which Sterling had thought, before, indicated that Nayland Smith was right when he had declared Dr. Fu Manchu to be a brilliant madman. "Note the fires of union!"

The heat of the place as they descended nearer and nearer to the furnace was becoming almost unendurable. But now came a loud and vicious crackling, the clang of metal, and the furnace door was thrown open.

A blaze of light from the white-hot fire poured across the floor below. Mummy-like figures moved in it to approach that miniature hell, now extending instruments resembling long narrow tongs.

From the white heat of the furnace they grabbed what looked like a ball of light, and lowered it to the floor.

The furnace doors were reclosed by two more mummy-like figures which appeared out of the shadows.

The scene became more and more fantastic. The incandescent globe was shattered. Where it had been, Sterling saw a number of objects resembling streaks of molten metal; their glow grew dim and more dim.

"This work," said Dr. Fu Manchu, "will engage your attention in the immediate future. You have grossly interfered with my plans in the past, and I might justly and perhaps wisely, kill you. Unfortunately, I am short of labour at the moment, and you are a physically strong man——"

"You mean," asked Sterling, "that you are going to make me work down in that hell?"

"I fear it must be so——" the speaker's voice was very sibilant. "Continue to the base of the stairs."

And Sterling, descending, found himself at the bottom of the huge black shaft. The furnace was closed—the Inferno dimly lighted. Not one of the mummy-wrapped figures was to be seen. But the heat——

A tunnel sloped away on his right. Far down it, a solitary lantern appeared, as if to indicate its clammy extent—for, as he could see, this tunnel dripped with moisture and its floor was flooded in places. A grateful coolness was perceptible at the entrance to this unwholesome looking burrow.

"You will observe," said Dr. Fu Manchu—who invariably spoke as if addressing a class of students—"that the temperature is lower here than on the stairs. We are actually

a hundred and twenty feet below the surface. . . . We will return."

The authority behind Dr. Fu Manchu's orders had a quality which created awe, without making for resentment. Sterling had experienced in the past this imposition of the Chinaman's gigantic will. The power of Fu Manchu's commands lay in his acceptance of the fact that they would never be questioned.

He passed the Chinaman, stepped on to the narrow stair, and clutching the iron rail proceeded upwards.

"It may interest you to learn," came the harsh voice from behind him, "that human flesh is excellent fuel in relation to this particular experiment. . . ."

Sterling made no reply . . . the implication was one he did not care to dwell upon. He remembered that Dr. Fu Manchu had said, "I had intended to incinerate your body."

These stairs with their rusty hand-rails, seemed all but interminable. Descent had been bad enough, but this return journey, following on the spectacle below, was worse. Vague gleams from the pit fitfully lighted the darkness. From behind, Dr. Fu Manchu directed a light upon the crude wooden steps. . . .

Sterling found himself back again in a curiously high, narrow, brick corridor which led to the vault in which he had first awakened. He had just passed a low door, deep sunken in brickwork, when:

"Stop," the imperious voice directed.

There came a sound of rapping on the door—that of a bolt shot free—a faint creaking.

"Step back a pace, lower your head, and go in."

Sterling obeyed. He knew that the alternative was suicide. This place, he began to realize, in addition to its heat, had a vague but ghastly charnel-house odour. . . .

He went ahead along a narrow passage; someone who had opened the door stood aside to allow him to pass. He found himself in a small, square, brick chamber illuminated by one unshaded bulb hanging on a length of cable. He heard the outer door being bolted.

There was a camp bed, a chair and a table on which stood a glass and a bottle of water. This square brick chamber had never been designed for habitation; he was in the bowels of some uncompleted engineering plant. . . .

The man who had admitted him—who had stood aside when he had entered—appeared now in the doorway—a huge negro with a pock-scarred face.

For one breathless moment Alan Sterling stared, not daring to believe what he saw—then:

"Ali Oke!" he whispered.

The expression on the black face of the man so oddly named defied definition—but it resolved itself into a grin. Ali Oke raised a finger to his lips in warning—and closed the heavy door. Sterling heard the sound of a bolt being shot. . . .

Ali Oke! It was all but incredible!

Ali—called "Oke" because this term was his equivalent for "I understand" or "very good, sir"—had been Sterling's right-hand man on his Uganda expedition! He found it

hard to believe that the faithful Ali, pride of the American Mission School, could be a servant of Dr. Fu Manchu. . . .

Complete silence. Even that queer dim roaring had ceased. . . .

Yet—Sterling reflected—better men than Ali Oke had slaved for the Chinese doctor. He stared at the massive wooden door. A faint, sibilant sound drew his gaze floorward.

A piece of paper was being pushed under the door!

Sterling stooped and snatched it up. It was a fragment from the margin of a newspaper, and on it in child-like handwriting was written in pencil:—

Not speak. Somebody listen. Write something. Can send somebody. Ali.

CHAPTER 28

TUNNEL BELOW WATER

INVESTIGATIONS IN SURREY brought some curious points to light.

It was late in the afternoon when Gallaho came to Sir Denis's apartment to make his report. To be on duty for twenty-four hours was no novelty to the C.I.D. man, but he was compelled to admit to himself that he felt extremely tired. Sir Denis, who wore a dressing-gown, but who was fully dressed beneath, simply radiated vitality. He was smoking furiously, and his blue-grey eyes were as keen as if, after a long and dreamless sleep, he had emerged fresh from his bath.

Gallaho, who guessed Sir Denis to be ten years his senior—as a matter of fact, he was wrong—found a constant source of amazement in Nayland Smith's energy.

He reported that the mews to which Sir Bertram Morgan's car had been driven was known to have accommodated a Ford lorry belonging to a local contractor.

Nayland Smith laughed shortly, pacing up and down the carpet.

"When it comes to making important engagements in an unoccupied house, but one with which in the past—and he never forgets anything—the Doctor has been familiar; when, above all, he condescends to travel in a decorator's lorry . . ."

He laughed again, and this time it was a joyous, boyish laugh, which magically lifted the years and showed him to be a young man.

"It's all very funny," Gallaho agreed, "especially as Sir Bertram, according to his own statement, examined an ingot of pure gold which this Chinese magician offered to sell to him!"

Nayland Smith turned, and stared at the speaker.

"Have you ever realized the difficulty of selling gold, assuming you had any—I mean, in bulk?"

Gallaho scratched his upstanding hair, closed one eye, and cocked the other one up at the ceiling.

"I suppose it would be difficult, in bulk," he admitted; "especially if the gold merchant was forced to operate under cover."

"I assure you it would," said Nayland Smith. "No further clues from Rowan House, I suppose?"

"Nothing. It's amazing. But it accounts for an appointment at half-past two in the morning. They just dressed the lobby and two rooms of the house like preparing a stage-set for a one-night show."

"Obviously they did, Gallaho—and it is amazing, as you say. I remember the place very well; I was there on many occasions during the time Sir Lionel Barton occupied it. I remember, particularly, the Chinese Room, with its sliding doors and lacquer appointments. Those decorations which were not Barton relics—I refer to the preserved snakes, the chemical furnace, and so forth—were imported for Sir Bertram Morgan's benefit."

"That's where the Ford lorry came in!"

Nayland Smith dashed his right fist into his left palm.

"Right! You're right! That's where the lorry came in! The missing caretaker?"

"He's just described by local tradesmen as 'an old foreigner'——"

"Someone employed by, or bought by, Fu Manchu. We shall never trace him."

Gallaho chewed invisible gum.

"Funny business," he muttered.

"Rowan House has known even more sinister happenings in the past. However, I will look it over myself—some time to-day if possible. What about the lorry?"

"I have seen the former owner." Gallaho pulled out a book and consulted some notes. "He sold it on the fourteenth instant. The purchase price was thirty pounds. The purchaser he describes as 'a foreign bloke.' I may say, sir—" looking up at Sir Denis —"said contractor isn't too intelligent; but I gather that the 'foreign bloke' was some kind of Asiatic. It was up to the purchaser to remove the lorry at his convenience."

"How was payment made?"

"Thirty one-pound notes."

"Very curious," murmured Sir Denis. "Very, very curious. I am wondering what the real object could be in the purchase of this lorry. Its use last night was an emergency measure. I think we may take that for granted. Have you traced it?"

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Has any constable reported having seen it?"

"No one."

"What about the Morris out of the yard in Limehouse?"

"I have a short report about that," Gallaho growled, consulting his notes. "It's the property of Sam Pak, as we surmised, and various birds belonging to his queer aviary seem to drive it from time to time. My own idea is that he uses it to send drunks home. But it's for hire, and according to Murphy, who has been on the job down there, it was hired last night, or rather, early in the morning, by a lady who had dined on board a steamer lying in West India Dock."

"You have the name of the steamer, no doubt?"

"Murphy got it."

"Did any lady dine on board?"

"The ship mentioned in my notes, sir," Gallaho replied ill-humouredly, "pulled out when the fog lifted. We have no means of confirming."

"I see," snapped Nayland Smith, his briar bubbling and crackling as he smoked furiously. "But the driver?"

"A man called Ah Chuk—he's a licensed driver; he's been checked up—who hangs about Sam Pak's when he's out of a job. His usual work is that of a stevedore."

"Has anyone seen this man?"

"Yes—Murphy. He says, and Sam Pak confirms it, that he took the car down to the gates of West India Dock and picked up a lady who was in evening dress. He drove her

to the Ambassadors' Club——" Gallaho was reading from his notes—"dropped her there and returned to Limehouse."

"Where is the car now?"

"Back in the yard."

Nayland Smith walked up and down for some time, and then:

"A ridiculous, but a cunning story," he remarked. "However, Ah Chuk will probably come into our net. Anything of interest in the reports of the men who trailed customers leaving Sam Pak's?"

"Well——" Gallaho's growl grew deeper—"those that left were just the usual sort. Funny thing, though, is, that some of the customers you reported seeing inside didn't leave at all!"

"What!"

"Murphy reported seven people, six men and a woman, in the 'Sailors' Club'. Only three—two men and the woman—had come out at seven o'clock this morning!"

"Very odd," Nayland Smith murmured.

"There are two things," said Gallaho, "that particularly worry me, sir."

He closed his note-book.

"What are they?"

"That funny light, which I had heard of but never seen; and . . . Mr. Sterling."

He stared almost reproachfully at Sir Denis. The latter turned, smiling slightly.

"I can see that you are worrying," he said, "and quite rightly. He is a splendid fellow—and he was very unhappy. But an individual described by the hall porter as a loafer, left this note for me an hour ago."

He crossed to the writing-table, took up an envelope and handed it to Chief detective-inspector Gallaho. The latter stared at it critically. It was an envelope of poor quality, of a kind which can be bought in packets of a dozen at any cheap stationer's and upon it in what looked like a child's handwriting, appeared:—

Nayland Smith
No 7 Westminster Court
Whitehall

The inscription was in pencil. Gallaho extracted the contents—a small sheet of thin paper torn from a pocket-book. Upon this, also in pencil, the following message appeared:

To:—Nayland Smith
No 7 Westminster Court
Whitehall

In hands of Fu Manchu. In some place where there is a deep pit, a furnace, and a tunnel below water. I know no more. Do your best.

Alan Sterling.

By the same hand which had addressed the envelope, one significant word had been added below the signature:

Limehouse

Gallaho stared across at Sir Denis. Sunshine had temporarily conquered the fog. The room was cheerful and bright. Gallaho found himself looking at a puncture in one of the windows, through which quite recently a message of death had come but had missed its target.

"Is this Mr. Sterling's writing?"

"Yes." Nayland Smith's eyes were very bright. "What do we know about *tunnels*, Gallaho?"

CHAPTER 29

AT THE BLUE ANCHOR

THE MAN with the claret coloured nose was becoming quarrelsome. His unshaven friend who wore a tweed cap with the brim pulled right down over his eyes, was drunk also, but in a more amiable way.

John Bates, the landlord of The Blue Anchor, shirt-sleeved behind the bar, watched the pair inquiringly. The man with the claret nose came in at longish intervals, and was usually more or less drunk. Bates supposed that he was a hand in one of the coasting steamers which sailed from a near-by dock. His friend was a stranger, nor did he look like a sailor.

The Blue Anchor had only just opened and there were no other customers in the private bar, which was decorated with sporting prints and a number of Oriental curiosities which might have indicated that the landlord, or some member of his family, had travelled extensively in the East. John observed with satisfaction that the phenomenal fog which had lifted during the day, promised to return with the coming of dusk.

From long experience of dockland trade, John had learned that fog was good for business. He lighted a cigarette, leaning on the bar and listening to the conversation of the singular pair.

"I bet you half a quid as it was above Wapping."

The claret nosed man was the speaker, and he emphasized his words by banging his fist upon the table before him. John Bates was certain now that he was a sailor and that he had a pay-roll in his pocket. The other man stolidly shook his head.

"You're wrong, Dick," he declared, thickly. "It was somewhere near Limehouse Basin."

"Wapping."

"Limehouse."

"Look here." Claret Nose rose unsteadily to his feet, and approached the bar. "I'm goin' to ask you to act as judge between me and this bloke here. See what I mean, guv'nor?"

John Bates nodded stolidly.

"It's a bet for half a quid."

Bates liked bets; they always led up to rounds of drinks, and:

"Put your money on the counter," he directed; "I'll hold the stakes."

Claret Nose banged down a ten shilling note and turning:

"Cover that!" he shouted, truculently.

The other man, who proved to be tall and thin when he stood up, extracted a note from some inner pocket and placed it upon that laid down by the challenger.

"Right." John Bates inverted a tumbler upon the two notes. "Now, what's the bet about?"

"It's like this," said the red-nosed man—"we was talkin' about tunnels——"

"Tunnels?"

"Tunnels is what I said. We talked about the Blackwall Tunnel, the Rotherhithe Tunnel and all sorts of bloody tunnels——"

"What for?" John Bates inquired.

"We just felt like talkin' about tunnels. Then we got to one what was started about fifty years ago and never finished. A footpath, it was, to go under the Thames from somewhere near Wapping Old Stairs——"

"Limehouse."

The lean man, bright eyes peering out from beneath the brim of his remarkably large tweed cap, had imparted a note of challenge to the word.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Bates. "I never heard of such a tunnel."

"Fifty years ago, everybody'd heard about it."

"I wasn't here fifty years ago."

"I thought you knew all there was to know about this part o' the world."

"I know a lot but I don't know that. The Old Man would know."

"Well, ask the Old Man."

"He's upstairs, having a lay down." Bates turned to a grinning boy who now stood at his elbow. "Keep an eye on that money, Billy," he instructed. "I sha'n't be a minute."

He raised the flap of the bar, came through, and went upstairs.

"While we're waitin'," said Claret Nose, "another couple o' pints wouldn't do no harm."

"Right," the other agreed, and nodded to the boy. "The loser pays, so——" pointing to the notes beneath the inverted tumbler, "you take it out of one of those."

John Bates returned inside three minutes from his interview with the invisible Old Man. He was grinning broadly, and carrying a cloth-bound book.

"Which of you said Limehouse?" he demanded.

"I did," growled the man in the tweed cap.

Bates, stepping in between the two, raised the tumbler, and returned a ten shilling note to the last speaker. "The drinks are on you," he said, addressing the other. "I'll have a small whisky and soda."

"Ho!" said the red-nosed one, "you will, will you? You will when you tell me where the bloody tunnel *was*, and prove it wasn't Wapping."

John Bates opened what proved to be a scrapbook, placing it upon the counter. He pointed to a drawing above which the words "Daily Graphic June 5, 1885" appeared. There were paragraphs from other papers pasted on the same page.

"There you are, my lad. What the Old Man doesn't know about this district, nobody can tell him. Never mind about closing one eye, George——" addressing Claret Nose; "I don't think you could read it even then. It boils down to this: There was a project in 1885 to build a footpath from where we stand now, to the Surrey bank. A shaft was

sunk and the tunnel was commenced. Then the scheme collapsed, so the Old Man tells me."

"Ho!" said the loser, staring truculently at the grinning boy behind the bar. "A small whisky and soda for the guv'nor, and take it out of that——" pointing to the note.

"What did they do with this 'ere shaft?" growled the man in the tweed cap.

"The Old Man doesn't know," Bates replied. "Everybody about here, except him, has forgotten all about it. But if you're in any doubt, I can tell you something else. He told me to tell you."

"What's that?"

The voice of the man in the tweed cap exhibited an unexpected interest, and John Bates glanced at him sharply; then:

"You know the old wharf?" he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, "which has been up for sale for years—a sort of Chinese restaurant backs right on to it."

"I know it," growled the red-nosed man.

"Well, the one and only ventilation shaft of this tunnel comes out there, so the Old Man says; in fact, it must run right up through the building, or at the side of it."

"Ho!" said the man in the tweed cap. "Have another drink."

CHAPTER 30

THE HUNCHBACK

NAYLAND SMITH, wearing his long-peaked, large, check cap, and Detective-sergeant Murphy, very red of nose but no longer drunk, stood upon a narrow patch of shingle. That mysterious mist which had claimed London for so many days in succession had already masked the Surrey bank. They were staring up at the roof of that strange excrescence belonging to Sam Pak's restaurant.

"The ventilation shaft which Bates referred to," said Sir Denis, "is at the back of the bar, for a bet. It accounts for the heat at that end of the room."

"Why *heat*, sir?"

"It is probably regarded as an old flue," Nayland Smith went on, apparently not having heard his query, "and it very likely terminates in that big square chimney stack up yonder."

"It's above there that the light is seen."

"I know, hence my deduction that that is where the ventilation shaft comes out. Unofficial channels, Sergeant, often yield more rapid information than official ones."

"I know, sir."

"It was a brain wave to apply to The Blue Anchor for information respecting the site of this abandoned tunnel of fifty years ago. It is significant that no other authority, including Scotland Yard, could supply the desired data."

"But what's your theory, sir?" I am quite in the dark."

"It wasn't a theory; it was a mere surmise until last night, when Sir Bertram Morgan told me that Dr. Fu Manchu had shown him an ingot of pure gold. I linked this with the phantom light which so many people have seen above the restaurant of Sam Pak; then my rough surmise became a theory."

"I see, sir," said Sergeant Murphy respectfully: as a matter of fact, he was quite out of his depth. "There is no sign of the light to-night."

"No," snapped Nayland Smith, "and there's no sign of Forester's party."

A stooping figure passed the lighted window in the wooden outbuilding which abutted upon Sam Pak's.

"They are on the down-stream side of the place, sir. Inspector Forester thought they might have been spotted, and so to-night, he has changed his tactics."

"Good enough. I hadn't been notified of this."

They scrambled up the muddy shingle, climbed a ladder, and entered a little shadowy alley. A figure showed for a moment in misty darkness.

"Gallaho!" Nayland Smith challenged.

"O.K. sir. Everything's ready.

"Has the light been seen to-night?"

"Yes. Two hours ago; it hasn't appeared since."

“From my memories of Sam Pak, formerly known as John Ki,” said Smith rapidly, “he sleeps as lightly as a stoat. He may appear to be ignorant of the fact that his premises are being covered by the police, but appearances, in the case of an aged and cunning sinner of this kind, are very deceptive. To penetrate a second time to the Sailors’ Club, is rather like walking into the lions’ den.”

“I have heard a lot about Chinese cunning,” growled Gallaho, “and I have seen something of what this Dr. Fu Manchu can do. But you ought to know, sir, that the C.I.D. can put up a pretty sound show. I don’t think for a moment that there’s anything suspected inside there.”

“In any event,” said Nayland Smith, significantly, “don’t waste time if I give you the signal. Several lives are at stake.”

Two minutes later, he lurched into the Chinese delicatessen store of Sam Pak, Murphy close behind him. His make-up was identical with that which he had worn on his previous visit; but whereas in the Blue Anchor he had spoken Cockney, he now assumed that queer broken English of which he had a complete mastery.

The very stout lady was playing patience behind the counter. She did not look up. There was no one else in the shop.

Fourth wife of the venerable Sam Pak, sometime known as John Ki, she had borne him two sons, bringing the grand total to Sam’s credit up to eighteen. She knew something, but by no means all, of the life of her aged husband. He was an influential member of his Tong. He had secret dealings with great people; there was some queer business in the cellar, below the Sailors’ Club; and the Sailors’ Club, although it showed a legitimate profit, was really a meeting place for some secret Society of which she knew nothing, and cared less. Sam treated her well—his affairs were his own.

“Lucky Strike, please,” said Nayland Smith; “club price.”

Mrs. Sam Pak looked up sharply, recognized the new member, grinned at the old and drunken one, and nodded.

“Get them inside,” she said—and focussed her attention upon her cards.

Nayland Smith nodded, and walked to the door which led to the “club”. He opened it, went along the narrow passage, and presently entered the club-room, Murphy following.

The place presented much of its usual appearance. One of those games disallowed in Chinatown was being played. A fan-tan party occupied a table on the left. Two nondescript sailormen were throwing dice. Old Sam Pak sat behind the bar, apparently dead.

Nayland Smith and Murphy dropped down on to the dirty settee, half-way up the right-hand side of the room. From the withered lips of Sam Pak a faint whistle was emitted.

A hunchback Chinese boy with a patch over his eye appeared from the doorway on the left of the bar and approached the new arrivals.

“Beer!” said Murphy, in a loud, thick voice, assuming his usual rôle of a hard drinker.

The visible eye of the waiter opened widely. It was a long, narrow eye, brilliantly green, and dark-lashed. Automatically, as it seemed, the waiter bent over the table and swabbed it with a dirty duster.

"Sir Denis," came the soothing voice of Fah Lo Suee, "you are in danger."

"Blimey," muttered Murphy, "we're spotted!"

"Thank you," Nayland Smith replied in a low tone. "I rather suspected it."

"It is useless to attempt anything to-night. You would find nothing." She continued to swab the table. "I will join you if you say so. I mean it."

"I could never trust you."

"My life has been hell, since something you know about. I am sincere—I don't wish *his* death . . . but I must get away."

"I wonder. . ."

Old Sam Pak whistled again, this time more shrilly.

One of the fan-tan players deserted the party, and crossed to the door which communicated with the shop.

"Oh God!" whispered Fah Lo Suee. "He knows! If I can save *you*, will you save *me*?"

"Yes!" snapped Nayland Smith.

CHAPTER 31

THE SI-FAN

"HANDS UP!"

Nayland Smith was on his feet, covering the room.

He had noted that the door which now barred the way out to the shop and to the street was a heavy iron door of that kind which at one time gave so much exercise to the police of New York's Chinatown. The man who had closed the door, turned, and, back to it, slowly raised his hands. He was a short, incredibly thick-set Burman, built like a gorilla, with long arms and a span of shoulder which told of formidable strength.

The other men at the fan-tan table also obeyed the order. Fah Lo Suee, following a moment's hesitation, caught a swift side-glance from Smith and raised her hands.

Murphy, pistol ready, slipped behind Sir Denis and made for the Burman.

The bowl of a heavy bronze incense-burner stood upon the counter where it was used as a paper-weight and a receptacle for small change. At this moment, the aged Sam Pak—snatching it up with a lightning movement incredible in a man of his years—hurled the heavy bowl with unerring aim.

It struck Nayland Smith on the right temple.

He dropped his automatic, staggered, and fell forward over the table.

Sergeant Murphy came about in a flash, a police whistle between his teeth. Stupefaction claimed him for a moment as he saw Sir Denis lying apparently dead across the table . . . for no more than a moment; but this was long enough for the baboon-like Burman who guarded the door.

In two leaps worthy of the jungle beast he so closely resembled, the man hurled himself across the room, sprang upon the detective's shoulders, and, herculean hands locked about his neck, brought him to the floor!

Too late to turn to meet the attack, Murphy had sensed the man's approach. At the very moment that the Burman made his second spring, the detective pulled the trigger.

The sound of the shot was curiously muffled in that airless, sealed-up place. The bullet crashed through the woodwork of the bar, and into a wall beyond, missing old Sam Pak by a matter of inches. But that veteran, motionless in his chair, never stirred.

As the pistol dropped from Murphy's grasp, the Burman, kneeling on his back, lifted one hand to the detective's jaw, and began to twist his head sideways—slowly.

"No!" Fah Lo Suee whispered—"*No!*"

The wrinkled yellow lips of Sam Pak moved slightly.

"It is for the Master to decide," he said, in that seaport bastard Chinese which evidently the Burman understood.

Fah Lo Suee, wrenching the patch from her eye and the cap from her head, turned blazing eyes upon the old Chinaman.

"Are you mad?" she said, rapidly in Chinese. "Are you mad? This place is surrounded by police!"

“I obey the orders, lady.”

“Whose orders?”

“Mine.”

A curtain on the left of the bar was drawn aside—and Dr. Fu Manchu came in . . .

The Orientals in the room who were not already on their feet, stood up; even old Sam Pak rose from his chair. The Burmese strangler, resting his right foot upon Murphy’s neck, rose to confront the Master. A queer hush descended where a scene of violence had been. All saluted the Chinese doctor, using the peculiar salutation of the Si-Fan, that far-flung secret society which Nayland Smith had spent so many years of life in endeavouring to destroy.

Dr. Fu Manchu wore Chinese indoor dress, and a mandarin’s cap was set upon his high skull. His eyes were half closed, but his evil, wonderful face exhibited no expression whatever.

Nevertheless, he was watching Fah Lo Suee.

A muffled scream in a woman’s voice, doubtless that of Mrs. Sam Pak, broke this sudden silence. There were loud cries; the flat wailing of a police whistle; and then a resounding crash.

The wooden door of the Sailors’ Club had been broken down . . . but the iron door now confronted the raiding party.

Dr. Fu Manchu turned slowly, holding the curtain aside.

“Let them all be brought down,” he directed.

CHAPTER 32

IRON DOORS

INSPECTOR GALLAHO heard the sound of the shot—but very dimly. Later, he was to know why it had sounded so dim. At the time he did not understand, and wondered where the shot had been fired. It was not the pre-arranged signal, but it was good enough.

He was leaning out of a window above a shuttered-up shop. The room to which it belonged, a dingy bedroom, had recently been leased by a respectable man of the sea. The landlady who owned the shop, a little general store, had been given tickets for the second house at the Palladium, as her well-behaved lodger was unable to use them that evening. It was unlikely that she would be back until considerably after midnight.

The room was full of plain clothes police.

"Jump to it, Trench," growled Gallaho. "That was a shot!"

The door behind him was thrown open. Heavy footsteps clattered down the stairs. He waited at the window, watching.

He saw Detective-officer Trench come out from the door below and dash across to the entrance to Sam Pak's restaurant, two men close behind him. He waited until the rest of the party had set out for their appointed posts; then himself descended.

There was a smell of paraffin and cheese on the staircase which he found definitely unpleasant. In the open doorway he paused for a moment, readjusting his bowler. A woman's scream came from Sam Pak's shop. Something about it did not sound English. There was a sudden scuffling—a crash—another crash. On the river bank a police whistle wailed.

Gallaho crossed and walked in.

Mrs. Sam Pak, her gross features curiously leaden in hue, sat in a state of semi-collapse upon a chair before one of the small tables. Trench and another man were breaking down the door at the other end of the shop; the third detective guarded the woman.

"What is this?" she demanded. "Are you bandits? By what right do you break up my place?"

"We are police officers," growled Gallaho, "as you have already been informed. I have a warrant to search your premises."

The third man turned.

"She locked the door and hid the key the moment we came in, Inspector."

"You know the penalty, don't you?" said Gallaho.

Mrs. Sam Pak watched him sullenly.

"There is nothing in my house," she said; "you have no right to search it."

The lock gave with a splintering crash—but the door refused to open more than a few inches.

"Hello!" said Trench, breathing heavily. "What's this?"

"Let *me* have a look," said Gallaho.

As he stepped forward, torch in hand, the third man advanced also, but:

"Close the shop door, and pull the blinds down," Gallaho directed, tersely.

He reached the broken door which refused to open fully, and shot the light of his torch through the aperture, then:

"K Division has been blind to this dive," he growled. "They've got an *iron door*!"

"Whew!" whistled Trench.

The four men stared at each other; then, their joint gazes were focussed upon Mrs. Sam Pak, seated, ungainly but indomitable, upon a small chair which threatened to collapse beneath her great bulk.

"You are under arrest," said Gallaho, "for obstructing the police in the execution of their duty."

There came the roar of a powerful motor. The Scotland Yard car concealed not far away, had arrived.

"Open the door," Gallaho directed, "and take her out."

The woman, breathing heavily and pressing one hand over her heart, went out without protest.

"What now, Inspector?"

"We've got to find another way in. Make contact with Forester. That sailor man of his is on the job again to-night. We shall have to go up the ladder and in at that back window."

"Very good, Inspector."

At any hour, in any London street, whatever the weather conditions, a crowd assembles magically at the first sign of trouble. A sort of drizzling rain descended through the mist which overhung Limehouse. Few pedestrians had been abroad when that muffled shot had sounded at Sam Pak's. But now an interested group, eight or ten strong, formed a semicircle before the door as the man detailed to get in touch with the River Police came out and ran rapidly along the street.

As he disappeared in the mist, Gallaho opened the door and stepped out on to the wet pavement. Two police constables came up at the double.

"Clear these people away," Gallaho directed. "I'm in charge here, and I don't want loafers."

At that the two constables got busy with the well-known formula "Move on, there." The reluctant ones were gently shoved, and by that combination of persuasion and force which is one of the highest assets of the Metropolitan Police, the immediate neighbourhood was cleared of unofficial spectators. Windows had been opened, and heads craned curiously from them. The police car had pulled up half a block away, but now the officer in charge of the party came forward.

"What's the trouble, sir?" he asked, saluting Gallaho. "Can't we get through?"

"Iron door," growled the Inspector.

"That means the finish of Sam Pak."

"I know it does—and I'm wondering why it's worth it."

Forester of the River Police, handling the matter in accordance with his own ideas, had already sent Merton up with a line, and the rope ladder was attached fully ten minutes before the signal reached him.

The shot in the Sailors' Club he did not hear. A tugboat was passing at the time and the noise of its passage entirely drowned that of the muffled shot. But he heard the whistle.

Regardless on this occasion of attracting attention, the River Police craft was pushed as near as possible to the overhanging superstructure. Forester got on to the ladder, and began to climb. He turned.

"Nobody else until I give the word!" he shouted.

He reached the lighted window and looked in. He saw a dismal kind of bedroom, with a cheap iron bedstead in one corner, a dressing-table by the further window on his right, a chair, a number of odds and ends suggesting occupancy by a woman, and very little else. He crashed a heavy sea-boot through the glass, bent perilously, found that the window was unlatched, and raised it an inch or two with the heel of his boot. Then, descending a rung, he raised it fully, reached over the ledge and drew himself into the room.

He stood for a moment listening. There was not a sound.

He leaned out of the window.

"Come on!" he shouted.

Forester turned left, running along the room in the direction of a half-open door, and found himself upon a staircase, uncarpeted. Not waiting for the party, he went clattering down.

The room above had been lighted by an unshaded electric bulb, and there was a similar crude light upon the stair. But, reaching its foot and jerking a curtain aside, a curtain of some kind of rough patterned material, Forester saw darkness ahead of him.

Voices and bumping sounds indicated that his men were tumbling into the room above.

Forester shot the light of a torch into a place resembling a small restaurant. He stood, he discovered, at the end of a fairly well-stocked bar; dirty plush-covered seats ran along the wall on his left; there were a number of tables and chairs. Some of the tables were upset, and there was a faint tang, perceptible above the fugg of the place, which told him that it was here the shot had been fired.

Footsteps sounded upon the stairs behind him.

But Forester continued to direct the light of his torch steadily upon a door immediately ahead. It was an iron door of the kind one meets with in strong-rooms.

Forester whistled softly and walked forward.

"Hullo, Chief, where are you?" called a voice.

"O.K. Try to find a switch and light this place up."

The door, Forester saw at a glance, was one which locked automatically on being closed. Furthermore, a huge steel bolt had been shot into place. He withdrew the bolt, ignoring the scurrying footsteps of his men seeking the light control. Presently, one of them found it and the place became illuminated.

Forester pulled back the catch and hauled the door into the niche which it normally occupied, safe from the view of any casual visitor, and only to be discovered by one definitely searching for it.

A dingy corridor, dimly lighted, opened beyond. Forester found himself confronted by a badly damaged wooden door, the lock wrenched out of place and surrounded by jagged splinters, which lolled drunkenly in the opening. He started along the passage.

Another door, but this of a cheap wooden variety, was open at the end, and presently he found himself in Sam Pak's delicatessen store. Only one shaded light was burning, that behind the counter.

"Who's there?" came sharply.

A man was standing in the darkened shop, his hands thrust into the pockets of his overcoat.

"Inspector Forester. Who are you?"

The man drew his hands from his pockets.

"Detective-sergeant Trench, Inspector," he introduced himself; "C.I.D. You got through from the back, then?"

"Yes, we're in. Where's Inspector Gallaho?"

"I'll get him."

CHAPTER 33

DAUGHTER OF THE MANCHUS

NAYLAND SMITH tried to fight his way back to consciousness. He found himself unable to dissociate delirium from reality.

"My love, who has never loved me . . . Perhaps it might never have been, but now, it is too late . . ."

A woman's voice, a soothing, musical voice—and someone was bathing his forehead with Eau de Cologne.

Another blank came . . .

He was lying on a camp bed, in a low, square, brick chamber. His head throbbed agonizingly, but a soft arm pillowed his head, and soothing fingers caressed his brow. He struggled again to recover himself. This was phantasy, a disordered dream.

Where was he?

The act of opening his eyes alone had been an exquisite torture. Now, turning them aside, he experienced new pain. A woman, strangely dressed, knelt beside the bed upon which he lay. Her dark hair was disordered, her long green eyes watched him, piteously, supplicatingly, as the eyes of a mother watching a sick child.

Those long green eyes stirred latent memories, stimulating the dull brain. What woman had he known who possessed those eyes?

She was a strange creature. Her beautifully moulded lips moved as if she spoke, softly. But Nayland Smith could detect no words. Her shoulders were bare; her skin reminded him of ivory. And now, perhaps recognizing some return of understanding, she bent, fixing the gaze of her brilliant eyes upon him.

A moment of semi-lucidity came. He had seen this woman before; this woman with the ivory shoulders and the green eyes. But if a woman, why did she wear coarse grey flannel trousers? . . . She was perhaps half a woman and half a man . . .

Hot lips were crushed to his own, as darkness came again . . .

"You have never known . . . you would never have known . . . but at least we shall die together . . . Wake, oh, my dear! wake; for the time is so short, and because I know I have to die, now I can tell you . . ."

Nayland Smith, as if in obedience to those urgent words, fought his way back to full consciousness.

The brick chamber and the camp bed had not been figments of delirium. He actually lay upon such a bed in a square brick chamber. The woman tending him was Fah Lo Suee!

Recognizing the return of full consciousness, she gently withdrew her arm from beneath his head, composedly rearranging the silk straps of a tiny garment which afforded a strange contrast to the wrinkled flannel trousers.

Nayland Smith saw that a grey coat, a complement of the trousers, lay upon the floor near by. There was a bowl of water on a little table beside him, a small bottle and

a piece of torn silk saturated with Eau de Cologne.

Fah Lo Suee replaced the coat which was part of the uniform of the one-eyed waiter, and quietly seating herself on the solitary chair which the chamber boasted, watched him coolly and without embarrassment.

Had he heard aright? Had he heard this woman—thinking that she spoke to an unconscious man—profess her love? Had she pressed her lips to his? He was beginning to remember; now clearly recalled all that had happened. Perhaps those later impressions were unreliable, or perhaps—a possibility—it was a deliberate move on the part of this daughter of an evil father. A new plot—but what could its purpose be?

Good God! He was in the power of Dr. Fu Manchu, his life-long enemy!

It was the end! She had said it was the end, unless he had dreamed. He moved his head so that he could see her more clearly. Heavens! Who and what had struck him? His memories afforded no clue to the identity of his assailant. And Sergeant Murphy? What had become of Sergeant Murphy?

Fah Lo Suee watched him under lowered lashes.

Any make-up which she had worn in her rôle of Chinese waiter, had been removed. He must suppose that those long lashes were naturally dark. But her lips were pale, and now, from the pocket of the dirty flannel jacket, she took out a lip-stick and a mirror which formed the lid of a small rouge-box. Unaffectedly, she adjusted her appearance to her own satisfaction, delicately rouging her cheeks.

Sir Denis watched her. Slowly he was regaining control of mind and body. Finally, replacing the tiny toilet case, Fah Lo Suee pulled out a yellow packet of cigarettes and bending forward, offered one.

A picture of the elegant Madame Ingomar flashed momentarily before his mind . . . The long jade holder; those patrician cigarettes of the finest yenedji . . .

"Thank you," he said, and was glad to find that his voice was steady.

He took the cigarette, and Fah Lo Suee, placing another between her lips, dropped the packet back into her pocket, producing a lighter which she snapped into life, and lighting both.

Nayland Smith cautiously sat upright. This ghastly brick chamber, which might have been part of a sewer works, swam around him. His head ached mercilessly. His sight, too, was queerly dim. He had been struck upon the temple. He leaned back against the wall in an angle of which the bed was set.

"Fah Lo Suee," he said—"for I know you by no other name: where are we, and why are we here together?"

She glanced at him swiftly, and as swiftly looked aside.

"We are in part of the workings of an abandoned Thames tunnel. We are together because . . . we are going to die together."

Nayland Smith was silent for a moment, watching her, and then:

"Is this place below Sam Pak's?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then the raiding party will break through at any moment."

“There are iron doors,” Fah Lo Suee replied, tonelessly. “Long before they can force them, we . . .”

She shrugged her shoulders, fixing the gaze of her long, narrow eyes upon him. Nayland Smith met that queer, contemplative gaze.

He realized how rarely in the past, in all his battles with the group surrounding Dr. Fu Manchu, he had looked into the eyes of Fah Lo Suee. How much had he dreamed?—to what extent now were his impressions his own, and to what extent due to the hypnotic power which he knew this woman to possess?

“Fu Manchu’s daughter,” he said: “Do you hate me as your father hates me?”

Fah Lo Suee closed and opened the slender fingers of her left hand. He watched that hand fascinatedly—thinking of the dirty yellow fingers of the Chinese waiter. His thoughts drew his glance floorwards, for there, near the chair upon which Fah Lo Suee sat, lay two crumpled objects which had puzzled him.

They were painted gloves!—gloves which had concealed the varnished nails and slim, indolent fingers of this daughter of the Manchus.

He glanced up again, and swiftly though Fah Lo Suee lowered her lashes, nevertheless, she had answered his question.

And he was silenced.

“I have loved you since the first day I ever saw you,” she replied, quietly.

And, listening to the music of her voice, Nayland Smith understood why so many men had fallen under its spell . . .

“I have had many of those experiences which are ridiculously called ‘affairs’, but the only man I could ever love, was the only man I could never have. You would never have known, for I should never have told you. I tell you now, because, although we could not live together, we are going to die together.”

CHAPTER 34

MORE IRON DOORS

"No way out," said Gallaho, flashing his light about a low cellar, which contained stores of various kinds: bottles of wine, casks of beer, and cases of gin and whisky. There were cheeses, too, and even less fragrant delicacies of Chinese origin.

"This way, sir," came a voice from somewhere above. "Here's the way down!"

Gallaho came out of the cellar, and hurried up to a kitchen where Trench was standing before an open cupboard. The shelves of this cupboard contained all kinds of rubbish—tins, old papers, cardboard boxes. But in some way, probably by accident, the Scotland Yard man had discovered a hidden latch, and had swung all these shelves inward, for they constituted a second, masked, door.

Hot, stifling air came up out of the darkness beyond.

"This is just below the bar, Inspector, and I noticed how hot it was at that end of the club-room."

"What's in there? Be careful."

Gallaho came forward and shot his light into the cavity. A steeply sloping passage with wooden steps was revealed.

"Come on," he growled, and led the way.

Ten steps down there was a bend, Gallaho cautiously rounded it, and saw more steps ahead. It was very hot in this place, a thing for which he was quite unable to account. A brick landing was reached. Some of the brickwork had fallen away, and:

"This is built into an iron framework," came a voice from somewhere behind.

There was a steady tramp of feet upon the stairs.

"Oh!" said Gallaho. "That's funny!" He paused and looked about him. "I wonder if this is anything to do with the tunnel that Sir Denis has been inquiring about?"

"It's been built a long time."

"So I see. Also, it goes down a long way."

The formation of the steps became more crude, the lower they went. They were merely boards roughly attached to cement. Now came a long, straight passage, brick-walled and cement floored. Gallaho led on; but it was so extensive that before he had reached the end, the whole of the party engaged in searching Sam Pak's premises filed along behind him.

"This is a queer go," said someone.

"We must be below Thames level."

Gallaho pulled up with a jerk.

"Thames level or not," he growled, "we've struck it here."

"What is it, Inspector?"

Trench and others came crowding forward; Forester, far behind, was bringing up the rear.

“It’s this: another blasted *iron door*! I want to know the history of this place, and I want to know why no report has ever been made upon it. Iron doors in a restaurant—why?”

CHAPTER 35

THE FURNACE

Alan Sterling had abandoned hope. The message to Nayland Smith written on a leaf of his pocket-book (for nothing had been taken from him with the exception of his automatic) and pushed under the door to Ali, had miscarried, or perhaps it had never been despatched.

No duties were allotted to him; no one came near the room. He was surrounded by an oppressive silence, through which, from time to time, that muted roaring seemed to vibrate. In his fall he had smashed his wristwatch, and so had no means of knowing the time.

Hour after hour went by. He was desperately thirsty, but for a long time resisted his desire to pour out a drink from the water bottle.

Logic came to his rescue. Since he was completely in the power of the Chinese doctor, why should the latter trouble to tamper with the drinking water, when without danger or difficulty he could shoot him down at any time?

And what had become of Ali? Was it possible that he had been detected, and that he, Sterling, was doomed to be left locked in this dark brick prison somewhere in the bowels of the earth, perhaps even under water? So situated, hope of rescue there was none, if those who had placed him there chose to remain silent.

In short, his life depended upon that note having reached Sir Denis, and upon his success in tracing the subterranean tunnel, so vaguely referred to in it.

Hours passed in silence and a great weariness claimed him. Telling himself over and over again "You must not fall asleep . . . you must not fall asleep," perhaps by the very monotony of reiteration, he presently lost all knowledge of his surroundings.

His awakening was a rude one.

He felt himself seized in a herculean grasp, lifted and then thrown face downward upon the bed!

Blindly, he began to struggle, but his ankles were grasped and firmly tied, throughout being held in such a manner that he was unable to reverse his position. Then, again he was lifted by his unseen assailant, lightly as a woman lifts a toy dog, and thrown back upon the bed.

A short, yellow man, stripped to the waist, grasped his arms, clasped them together with a remorseless strength which appalled Sterling, and adroitly tied his wrists with some kind of fine, strong twine.

The man was built like a baboon; his forehead was abnormally low, his arms incredibly long and of a muscularity which Sterling found almost incredible. The upper arms resembled the thighs of an athlete. The man had Crotonean shoulders and amazing chest development. His face was like a yellow mask; his sunken eyes registered no expression.

Sterling's heart sank.

This could only mean one thing. Ali Oke had been detected—his message to Nayland Smith had never reached its destination! Dr. Fu Manchu had changed his mind. Instead of employing him in the subterranean hell, he had determined to kill him . . .

This frightful awakening had temporarily robbed him of the power of speech, but now:

"Who are you?" he demanded, angrily. "Where are you taking me?"

The Burman, ignoring his words, treating him as he might have treated a heavy sack, grasped Sterling by the middle and threw him over his left shoulder. Stooping, he walked out through the open doorway.

As he hung limply across the gigantic shoulder, he could have wept with rage, for his very weakness.

He, a physically powerful man, as normal men go, had no more chance against this deformed monster than a child would have had against himself. Yet, the horrible Burman, with his thick bandy legs, was all of three inches shorter than Sterling!

On to those nightmare stairs which led down into the pit, he was carried. From time to time, fitful gleams of light danced on the iron girders, or sent a red glow up into the darkness. He was being carried to his death; every instinct told him so. . . .

One shaded lamp burned in the pit.

It hung directly in front of the furnace door. From time to time, at bends in the staircase, through eyes clouded by reason of his unnatural position, Sterling observed squat figures firing the furnace. The heat grew greater and greater. The place quivered and roared as white-hot flames were whipped up under a forced draught.

The bottom reached, his captor and carrier dropped him unceremoniously upon the concrete floor.

Bruised, dazed, he yet succeeded in rolling over into a position from which he could inspect the shadows surrounding that ring of light in front of the furnace.

Several things became visible which conjured up horrible possibilities.

He saw a number of rough wooden trestles, some six feet in length and eighteen inches wide, laid upon the floor in the circle of light.

What could their purpose be?

Some inert body lay quite near to him. He strained his eyes to peer through the darkness; but beyond the fact that it appeared to be the body of a man, he could make out no details. Two muscular Chinamen stripped to the waist appeared now under the light. One, he thought he recognized, unless he was greatly mistaken—for to Western eyes Chinese faces are very similar—as a man who had formed one of the fan-tan party on the night that he and Nayland Smith had visited the Sailors' Club.

The furnace door crashed open.

Scorching, blinding heat, poured out. Sterling wrenched his head aside. The Chinese stokers, probably professional firemen, fired the furnace, working mechanically and apathetically, although sweat poured down their faces and bodies like rain.

The furnace door was clanged into place again.

Sterling lay so near to it that it had been impossible to take more than quick glances about him during the time that the door had been open, for the heat had seared his eyes. Nevertheless he had seen enough to know that his doom was sealed . . . perhaps the doom of all who stood in the path of Dr. Fu Manchu.

The man lying near to him, gagged and bound, was Ali Oke . . .

Alone, this discovery would have been sufficient to dash his last hope. But there was worse.

On the other side of the furnace door and nearly opposite to where he lay, Nayland Smith crouched on one elbow, bound as he was bound. He had glimpsed him searching the place with agonized eyes, as he himself had searched it.

It was the end.

CHAPTER 36

DIM ROARING

"THERE'S ONLY ONE THING to do here," growled Gallaho, banging his fist on the iron door which barred further progress. "There's a bit of a cavity—so I suppose the hinges are sunk. A couple of dynamite cartridges will shift something."

"It might shift too much," said Forester, who had pushed his way from the rear, and now stood at the speaker's elbow. "Wouldn't it be better to send for a blow-torch?"

"Do you realize how long it would take to blow through this door?" Gallaho demanded. "Are you forgetting who's inside, and what may be happening?"

"I'm not forgetting. It was just a suggestion. Anyway, it's going to take time to get either."

"The longer we stand talking here, the longer it's going to take."

Gallaho, in common with many men of action, had a tendency to lose his temper when checked by such a barrier as this iron door.

"What do you suggest?"

"May *I* suggest something, sir?" came a voice.

"Yes, my man, what is it?"

"The Kinloch Explosive Works in Silvertown carry on all night. We could get there and back in half an hour in the Squad car, and probably bring someone with us who understands how to employ explosives on a job of this kind."

"Good man," growled Gallaho. "I'd better come along, as they won't act without authority. Will you take charge, Forester?"

"Certainly. But if I can get hold of a blow-torch by hook or by crook, I'm going to start."

"Good enough. No harm done."

Gallaho adjusted his bowler and set out. He disappeared along the corridor lighted only by the torches of the police. Forester turned to Trench.

"What about getting through to the Yard?" he suggested. "See if it's possible to get a blow-torch rushed down."

"We can try," Trench agreed. "Leave two men here in case the door happens to open from the other side—and there's a telephone upstairs in the shop."

These dispositions were made, and the remainder of the police tramped up the concrete stairs and the wooden stairs into the premises of Sam Pak.

The shop blinds had been drawn—all lights put out. A constable was on duty on the pavement outside. At the moment that they reached the shop, the roar of the Flying Squad motor proclaimed itself as Gallaho dashed by on his journey to Silvertown.

"Here's the telephone, Inspector," said one of the men.

Forester nodded to Trench.

"This is your department, not mine," he said. "You know who to call up, no doubt."

Trench nodded and stepped behind the counter, taking up the instrument.

He called Scotland Yard and waited.

A tense silence descended upon all the men present until the call was answered.

"Detective-sergeant Trench speaking," he said, and gave a code word in an undertone. "Thanks."

A further interval of silence, and then:

"Oh, is he, Inspector? Oh, I see . . . Yes, I suppose so, if those are the orders."

Trench placed his hand over the mouthpiece and turned.

"The Commissioner is standing by for a report on this job!" he whispered. "It wouldn't surprise me if he turned up——"

"Hello, sir. Yes, speaking from there, now. I'm sorry to report, sir, that Sir Denis has disappeared. We have reason to believe that he's been smuggled into the cellars of this place."

An interval of respectful silence, and then:

"The difficulty is, sir, they've got iron doors, here. I am speaking for Chief detective-inspector Gallaho, sir. He has proceeded in person to Silvertown to try to get an explosive expert to deal with one of the doors below, here. . . . Yes, sir. We thought a blow-torch might do the trick, if it's possible to get one down in time. . . . Very good, sir. Yes, every exit is covered."

He replaced the receiver and turned to Forester.

"The hell of it is," he said, "we don't know what's going on below, there, and we can do nothing! Our only arrest is Mrs. Sam Pak, and I don't believe she knows a thing!"

"*Sst!* . . . what's that?"

All stood silent, waiting for a repetition of the sound, and presently it came—a muffled cry.

"It's one of the men in the passage," said Trench, and ran off, Forester following, his heavy boots making a booming sound upon the wooden floor. They were half-way down the stairs when the man who had called out, met them. His expression indicated excitement.

"Come this way, Inspector," he said, "and listen."

Their torch lights moving eerily upon brick and plaster walls, they proceeded to the end of the long passage. Another man was standing with his ear pressed to the iron door. He signalled, and they all approached, standing silently, listening.

"Do you hear it?"

Forester nodded, grimly.

"What the hell is it?" he muttered.

A dim, but dreadful roaring was perceptible, coming it seemed, from remote deeps beyond the iron door.

CHAPTER 37

CHINESE JUSTICE

STERLING REALIZED as the horror in this hell pit rose ever higher that the company of the shadows was now complete.

Someone else had been borne down those many stairs and thrown like a sack upon the concrete floor. The doors of the furnace were opened again by the Chinese firemen, and again the heat seared his eyes. He tried to take advantage of that white glare; in a measure, he was successful.

Detective-sergeant Murphy had joined the company of the doomed; trussed and helpless he lay beyond Ali Oke.

The sweating Chinamen fed the hungry furnace.

It was the closest reproduction of the traditional hell which he believed could ever have been created. He struggled to his feet: his ankles were bound, his wrists were bound. But in some way to be upright again, though he could not move a step, seemed to reinforce his failing courage. The furnace doors were reclosed.

"Sir Denis!" he shouted, his voice reverberating in that shadow-haunted shaft. "Sergeant Murphy!"

In his extremity he spoke with the accent of the Middle West; indeed, his father's face was before him. He saw the home in which he had been born, Edinburgh University, too, where he had taken his degree; all the happy things of life. And Fleurette! Fleurette! Merciful heaven!—where was Fleurette? He would never see her again!

Murphy answered.

"O.K., sir," he called. "While there's life there's. . . ."

A dull thud, that of a blow, terminated the words.

"Murphy!" Sterling cried again, and was in that state when he recognized hysteria in his own voice, yet fought against it. Sir Denis, he remembered to have noticed in the glare of the furnace, had a bandage over his mouth. "Murphy!"

No answer came—but, in silhouette against the light, the gorilla shape of the Burman appeared.

"You yellow swine!" said Sterling viciously, and bound though he was, launched himself upon the broad, squat figure.

He received a blow upon the mouth which knocked him backwards. He tasted blood; his lips were split.

"If I could meet you in the open, you bandy-legged horror," he shouted, madly, "I'd knock you silly!"

The Burman, who wore heavy shoes, kicked him in the ribs.

Sterling groaned involuntarily. The pain of this last brutality threatened to overcome him. The horrible shadowy place began to swim before his eyes.

His wrists were aching: his hands were numb. Nevertheless he clenched his fists, clenched his teeth. He was writhing with pain; a rib had caved in—he knew it. But his supreme desire was to retain consciousness; to be on the job if any eleventh hour hope should offer.

"Be silent," came a musical voice out of the darkness.

Fah Lo Suee!

"My friend, you only add more pains to those that are to come."

Sterling succeeded in conquering himself. His maltreated body had threatened to master his brain. But his brain won.

Above the ever-increasing roar of the furnace, a voice reached him:

"I'm here, Sterling, old man—I couldn't speak before."

It was Nayland Smith.

In some way, the shadows of that dim shaft seemed to possess weight—to bear down on one oppressively. From where he lay, Sterling could not see the mouth of the tunnel, but he was oddly conscious of its presence, somewhere beyond the furnace. There was water above, a great quantity of water, probably the River Thames.

This sense of depth, of being buried far below the surface, alone was horrifying; with the accompaniments which surrounded him, plus a split lip and a dislocated rib, it stretched endurance to breaking point.

And then another voice spoke out of the darkness. It was a voice which, once heard, could never be forgotten: the voice of Dr. Fu Manchu.

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith: You are, I believe, acting for the Secret Service. You are a legitimate enemy. Detective-sergeant Murphy: You are attached to the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, and therefore entitled to my respect. Mr. Alan Sterling, you have voluntarily thrown yourself into the midst of my affairs, but since your motives are of a kind sometimes termed chivalrous, I shall accord to you also the honours of war."

The strange cold voice ceased for a moment.

Sterling struggled into a crouching position, ignoring the blood dripping from his chin, striving to forget the sharp pain of his injured rib.

"To-night may well be a climax in my war against folly and misrule; but if I triumph to-night, my path will be clear. My chief enemy will no longer obstruct me in my work, nor treachery live in my household. . . ."

That strange, impressive voice ceased—then uttered a short, guttural command.

The squat Burman appeared in the circle of light, dragging by the heels the inert body of Ali.

It now became obvious that the Nubian was bound hand and foot, and that a cloth was tied tightly over his mouth. His eyes seemed to bulge from his skull; his face was wet with the sweat of fear.

The Burman withdrew into the shadows, but appeared again almost immediately swinging a short, curved sword, which he seemed to handle with familiarity.

“This man is a traitor,” the guttural voice said softly; “I have held my hand too long.”

A swift, hissing word of command; and during some few, dreadful seconds in which Alan Sterling’s heart seemed to remain still in his breast, the Burmese executioner obeyed.

Twining the fingers of his left hand into the frizzy, black hair of the Nubian, he jerked him to his feet with a single movement of that long, powerful arm. And, as the man stood there bent forward, swaying—with one mighty, unerring sweep of the scimitar he severed his head from his body!

“My God!” groaned Sergeant Murphy—“my God!”

Unconcernedly, the executioner threw the body on to one of the wooden frames, lashed the trunk and feet with lines which were attached to the woodwork, and stood up, glancing into the darkness in the direction from which the voice of Dr. Fu Manchu had come.

In response to another hissing command, the two Chinese firemen came forward and threw open the furnace door. They raised the head of the framework to which the body was lashed. The Burman seized the other end.

They began to swing it to and fro, chanting in unison: “Hi yah, hi yah, hi yah!” as they swung.

Then, with a final shouted “Hi!” they propelled it into the white heart of the furnace.

They were about to close the door, when the Burman checked them—and stooped . . .

CHAPTER 38

THE BLUE LIGHT

"It's by no means as simple as all that, Inspector," the chemist in charge assured Gallaho. "Before I attempt a mining operation such as you describe, I should like to know what's above and what's below. Also, what's on the other side of this wall that you want me to blow down. You say it's a concrete wall?"

"It appears to be," growled Gallaho, fretfully; technicians were always an infernal nuisance.

"We could probably blast a way through the wall, but I'm wondering what that wall supports. We don't want half Limehouse to fall in on us."

"Well, come and see for yourself; but come provided—for almost anything may be happening to the people we want to rescue."

"I shall certainly come, Inspector. I don't fancy the responsibility, but it's not the kind of thing I want to delegate."

There were further delays whilst mysterious apparatus was assembled, and Gallaho, seated in the office of the chief chemist, tapped his fingers irritably upon the table, glancing from minute to minute at a big clock over the mantelpiece. Messengers were scouring the extensive works in search of an expert with the musical name of Schumann. His attendance, according to Mr. Elliott, the chief chemist, was indispensable.

Gallaho was getting very angry.

Finally, arrangements were completed. Two workmen who seemed to enjoy this break in their night duties carried mysterious boxes, packages and coils of cable. Schumann, who proved to be a taciturn, bearded German, merely nodded and grunted when the chief chemist explained the nature of the project.

At long last, they all climbed into the police car, and set out recklessly for Limehouse. Gallaho sat in front with the driver. He was altogether too irritable for conversation, and at a point in their journey not far from their destination:

"Pull up!" he directed, sharply.

The brakes were applied, and the car promptly brought to a standstill.

Inspector Gallaho stared forward and upward, and now, resting his hand on the driver's shoulder:

"Look!" he said. "What's that? Right over the river bank, in a line with the smokestack?"

The driver looked as directed. And then:

"Good Lord!" he whispered, "what is it?"

There was very little mist in the air, but lowering clouds overhung the river; and there, either in reality or reflected upon them as upon a screen, danced that bluish, elfin light; and Gallaho knew that it was directly above the roof of Sam Pak's.

"Go ahead!" he growled.

There was not much evidence of activity in the neighbourhood of the restaurant. The night life of Chinatown, such as it is, is a furtive life. A constable was standing on an adjacent corner, but there was little now to indicate that anything unusual had taken place there that evening, except the fact that the store was closed.

One or two customers who had applied there had gone away much puzzled by this circumstance.

No doubt there were watchers behind dark windows. No doubt the fact was known throughout the Chinese quarter that Sam Pak's had been raided and his wife arrested. But those who shared this secret information kept it very much to themselves, and kept themselves carefully out of sight.

Entering the shop, followed by the technicians with their apparatus:

"Anything new?" Gallaho growled.

Trench was waiting there.

"A most extraordinary roaring sound from somewhere below," he reported; "and the heat at the back of the bar, here, is remarkable."

"I have heard about this heat at the top end of the room," said Gallaho. "I can't make head nor tail of it." He walked forward. "Yes; the difference is very marked. What the devil can it be?"

"The place to hear the roaring, sir," said another voice, "is at the end of the passage, below, outside the iron door."

"Come on," said Gallaho, and made his way there. "Any report from the river?"

"Yes. That blue light has been seen up over the roof."

"I know . . . I have seen it myself."

CHAPTER 39

THE LOTUS GATE

STARK HORROR coming on top of physical pain all but defeated Alan Sterling. As the furnace doors were reclosed and the three yellow men sweating and half-naked were lost in the shadows outside the ring of light, he thought he heard a groan . . . and he thought that the man who groaned was Nayland Smith.

The gruesome place swam about him; the hard floor seemed to be moving like the deck of a ship.

He ground his teeth together and clenched his fists. He knew that a mighty effort was called for, or he should faint. If this happened he should despise himself; and if he must die, at least let him carry his self-respect to the end.

Nevertheless, it was touch and go. Physical nausea saved him.

He was violently sick.

"The bloody swine!" came out of the darkness which concealed Sergeant Murphy. "By heaven! there's something coming to this lot!"

"There is something coming to all of us, Sergeant Murphy." It was the cold, measured voice of Dr. Fu Manchu which spoke. "To-night, I am destroying some of the weeds which choked my path."

Somewhere in the neighbourhood of the tunnel, the entrance to which Sterling could not see from where he lay, a pump was at work. The roar of the furnace increased in volume. It was like the sustained roar of some unimaginable, ravenous beast.

He took a firm grip upon himself.

He was shaking violently: complete collapse threatened. . . . There was an interval during which the furnace door was opened again, but Sterling resolutely turned his head aside. At the clang of its closing he opened his eyes again.

"Paracelsus," came that strange voice out of the darkness—and, now, with a note of exaltation in it, a note of fanaticism, an oddly rising cadence—"Paracelsus, although in some respects an impostor, yet was the master of many truths; of the making of gold he knew something, but few have understood his dictum 'Vita ignis corpus lignum' (light is the fire, the body the fuel)."

He was silent for a moment. The roar of the furnace increased again in volume.

"The body the fuel . . ." he repeated. "Sir Denis Nayland Smith, Mr. Alan Sterling, Detective-sergeant Murphy. War is merciless, and I regret that you stand in my way. But in order that you shall realize the selflessness of my motives, I wish you, before going to join the shades of your ancestors, to be witnesses of my justice."

He uttered again that short, guttural command.

A figure walked gracefully out of the shadows into the light.

It was his daughter—Fah Lo Suee. She wore a green robe, cut low upon the shoulders, and of so fine a texture that every line of her slender body might be traced in its delicacy. There were jewels on her fingers and she smiled composedly.

Within the ring of light she knelt, and bowed her head in the direction of the unseen speaker.

The Burmese executioner had followed her. He stood behind her, now, looking upward.

"Of all the spies who have penetrated to my councils,"—the voice became more and more sibilant, rising ever upon a higher key—"this woman, my daughter, has been the chief culprit. There is traitor blood in her, but she has betrayed me for the last time."

Fah Lo Suee knelt motionless, her graceful head lowered.

"One who would do the work to which I have set my hand, must forget mercy in favour of justice. Yet because, though execrable, detestable, you are my daughter, I offer you the Lotus Gate of escape. Do you accept it?"

Fah Lo Suee raised her head. She was still smiling proudly.

"I accept," she said. "I have only loved one man in my life—and I accept on condition that the same gate shall be opened for him."

"I agree to this condition."

The tones of the speaker indicated repressed madness.

Fah Lo Suee extended her slender arms.

"Denis Nayland Smith," she said, and there was tragedy in her musical voice —"until to-night, you never even suspected. I have told you and I am unashamed. You go with me through the gate. Death gives me something that life could never give."

She paused; only the roar of the furnace could be heard. Then, stretching her arms upward, towards the hidden Dr. Fu Manchu:

"I am ready."

"To this I had been blind, yet I might have known—for woman is a lever which a word can bend."

The strange voice, exalted, oracular in mad inspiration, drew nearer in the darkness until Dr. Fu Manchu appeared in the circle of light.

His mask-like face was transfigured, his eyes glittered like jewels. He was a seer, a prophet, a man set above human laws. He carried a small, cut-glass goblet, upheld like a chalice.

"Rise," he commanded.

Fah Lo Suee stood upright.

"You are ready?"

"I am eager. It is my wedding night."

"Here is the desire of your heart . . . and death."

"Good-bye," said Fah Lo Suee, her lips curved in that proud, fearless smile.

She took the glass and drained its contents.

The crystal crashed to the floor. Fah Lo Suee sank down, slowly; her smile became a smile of rapture. She extended herself upon the concrete still wet with the blood of an earlier victim, and opened her arms ecstatically.

“Denis, my dear, my dear!” she whispered. “Hold me close. Then, I shall not be afraid.”

Her arms dropped—she lay still . . .

Sterling was past speech; even Murphy was silent. Dr. Fu Manchu turned and paced slowly back into the shadows. As he reached them, he uttered that quick, guttural order.

The Burman stooped, and placed the body of Fah Lo Suee upon one of the wooden racks. The two Chinamen appeared and the furnace door was thrown open.

Sterling had reached cracking point.

He heard an hysterical scream, but was unaware of the fact that he had uttered it. His last recollection of the scene was that of a monotonous chanting:—

“Hi yah, hi yah . . .”

CHAPTER 40

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH

Dr. Petrie reached London late at night.

One knowing him, who had met him at Victoria Station, would have noticed that whereas for many years his hair had been streaked with grey, the grey was now liberally streaked with white. He was but recently recovered from an illness which only an iron constitution and a will to live—not for the sake of life itself, but for his wife and newly discovered daughter—had enabled him to survive.

He had advised Nayland Smith of the time of his arrival; but, jumping from the train, for his activity was unimpaired by the stresses which had been imposed upon him, and looking eagerly up and down the platform, he failed to see the tall, gaunt figure of his friend.

This was unlike Smith.

Leaving a porter in charge of his baggage, he pushed rapidly on to the barrier. There was no sign of Nayland Smith, or even of Fey, that strange, taciturn creature who had been in Smith's service in Burma, who had now rejoined him in England.

It was unaccountable; a crown, almost crushing, to the anxiety which possessed him.

Fleurette!

He recognized in this moment of loneliness, of disappointment, that he had even dreamed of finding Fleurette there. Smith's last message had held out such a hope. Yet, there was no one here at all!

"Dr. Petrie," came a voice. "Dr. Petrie."

Petrie stared all about him, and then recognized that the speaker was a commissionaire.

"Yes!" he said, eagerly; "I am Dr. Petrie."

"Good evening, sir——" the man saluted. "I come from Sir Denis Nayland Smith's flat, sir. My orders are to ask you to proceed there at once."

Hope beckoned again, but anxiety remained.

"Is that all, Sergeant?"

"That is all I was told to say, sir."

"Thank you," said Dr. Petrie, wearily. "Have a drink as you go out, Sergeant."

"Thank you, sir. Good night."

The assembly of his baggage was a tedious business. A man who travelled light himself, on this occasion he was cumbered with many trunks and boxes belonging to Fleurette. He deposited the bulk of them in the cloakroom, and jumping into a taxi, proceeded to Westminster.

Fey admitted him.

Petrie observed with astonishment, for he knew the man for a perfect servant, that a large briar pipe was fuming in an ash-tray in the lobby.

“Good evening, sir.” Fey turned to the hall porter. “Leave the baggage to me. Your room is prepared, sir.”

“Is Sir Denis at home?”

“No, sir.”

Fey took Petrie’s hat and coat and Petrie walked through into the cheerful, lofty, sitting-room. He observed that the curtains had not been drawn in the bay window.

A premonition of some new disaster began to creep upon his mind. Fey joined him almost immediately.

“Whisky and soda, sir?”

“Thank you.”

Fey prepared one in silence, Petrie watching him; then:

“Where is Sir Denis?” he asked.

Fey handed the doctor his drink upon a silver tray, and then:

“I don’t exactly know, sir,” he replied; “and with regard to the pipe, sir: as you are aware, I am not unlike Sir Denis in build, and my orders are to keep walking up and down in view from the Embankment, below, smoking a pipe, but not to show my face too much.”

Petrie set his glass down.

“Do you mean that he is out on some investigation—and that your job is to pretend that he is at home?”

“Exactly, sir—excuse me.”

Fey went out and returned smoking the briar, strolled forward and stared out of the window. The night was damp but not foggy. The sky was overcast. He turned and walked back into the room.

“Is there any news, Fey, of . . . my daughter?”

“Sir Denis is certain that she is in London, sir, and alive.”

“Thank God!”

Dr. Petrie finished his whisky and soda at a gulp.

“There’s a bit of a mix up, sir, I am sorry to say. Things have been moving very fast. That Chinese devil has got hold of Mr. Sterling.”

“What!”

“But he was O.K. this morning; we had a message from him. I am a bit anxious to-night, though, and I’m glad you’ve arrived, sir.”

The unusual volubility of Fey alarmed Dr. Petrie anew.

“Where is Sir Denis?” he asked; “I must get in touch with him.”

“He’s gone to a place called Sam Pak’s, sir, in Limehouse. Somehow, I didn’t like the sound of it to-night, sir. This Chinese devil is desperate; it’s a fight to the death. . . .”

CHAPTER 41

THE LAST BUS

FLEURETTE OPENED HER EYES and looked in the direction where she thought the porthole of her cabin should be.

She closed them again quickly. She saw a small curtained window, but not a porthole. This seemed to be a cottage bedroom, very cleanly and simply furnished. She opened her eyes again.

The room remained as she had first seen it—she was not dreaming.

She clenched her hands tightly and sat up in bed.

Only a few hours before, her brain told her, she had parted from Alan in her cabin on the *Oxfordshire*. She remembered how much that last smile had cost her, that struggle to restrain her tears. She had heard his footsteps on the deck. And then, she had sat down, she remembered quite well, and had poured out a glass of water . . .

And now, what in heaven's name had happened? Where was she? And how had she got here?

It was very silent, this place in which she found herself, until a slight movement in an adjoining room told her that there was someone in there.

The room was lighted by moonlight, and although she could see that there was a lamp on the table beside the bed, she was afraid to switch it on. Throwing off the bedclothes she slipped lightly to the floor.

She realized that she was wearing a suit of pyjamas which did not belong to her. But, staring at a heap of garments in an armchair, she recognized the suit which she had actually been wearing when she had parted from Alan on the ship!

Her head ached slightly, and she knew that she had been dreaming. It was difficult to believe that she was not dreaming, now. She stepped to the window, and gently drawing the curtain aside, looked out.

She saw a little hedge-bordered garden with a smooth patch of grass in the centre of which stood a stone bird bath. There was a gaunt looking apple tree on the left, leafless now, a weird silhouette against the moon. Over the hedge, she could see the tops of other trees; but apparently the ground fell away there. She was, as she had supposed, in a cottage.

Whose cottage? And how had she got there?

Above all, where was Alan, and where was her father?

Was it possible that she had been seriously, dangerously ill?—that there had been a hiatus of which she knew nothing—that now she was convalescent?

Perhaps that person whose movements she had detected in the next room was a nurse. She retraced her steps, her bare feet making no sound upon the carpet, and looked for evidence to support this theory. There were no medicine bottles or cooling draughts upon the table beside the bed; nothing but a cigarette case—her own—and a box of matches.

A further slight movement in the adjoining room indicated that someone was seated there, reading. Fleurette had heard the rustle of a turned page.

She recognized with gratitude that despite this insane, this inexplicable awakening, she was cool and self-controlled. The theory of serious illness did not hold good. She felt perfectly fit except for that slight headache. She seated herself on the side of the bed, thinking deeply.

Her first impulse, to open the door and demand of whoever was in the next room what it was all about, she conquered. Fleurette had had the advantage of a very singular training. She had been taught to think, and this teaching availed her now. She crossed to the door very quietly, and by minute fractions of an inch began to turn the handle.

The door was locked.

Fleurette nodded.

A louder movement in the next room warned her that someone might be approaching. She slipped back into bed, drawing the clothes up close to her chin, but preparing to peep under her long lashes at anyone who should come in.

A key was quietly turned in the lock and the door opened.

Light shone in from a little sitting-room; Fleurette could see one end of it from where she lay. A newspaper and some illustrated magazines were upon a table beside which an armchair was drawn up. Her nostrils were assailed by that stuffy smell which tells of a gas fire. A strange looking old woman came into the bedroom.

She was big and very fat. In the glimpse which Fleurette had of her face in the lamplight, before she crossed the threshold, she saw that this was a puffy, yellow, wrinkled face, decorated by wide rimmed spectacles. The woman wore a costume which might possibly have been that of a hospital nurse. In silence she stood just within the little room, looking down at Fleurette.

To her horror, Fleurette saw that the woman carried a hypodermic syringe in her hand.

“Are you asleep?” she whispered, softly.

She spoke English, but with a strange accent. There was something in the crouching attitude of this huge woman, and something in the tones of her voice so threatening and sinister, that Fleurette clenched her hands beneath the coverlet. She lay quite still.

“Ah hah!” the woman sighed, evidently satisfied.

She returned quietly to the outer room, closing and gently relocking the door.

Fleurette listened intently, and whilst she listened she was thinking hard.

Sounds of subdued movements came from the outer room:—the chinking of glass, that subdued popping sound which indicates that a gas fire has been turned off; then a click—and the streak of light beneath the door vanished. Soft footsteps, evidently the woman wore padded slippers, moved beyond the partition against which Fleurette’s bed was set. A door was closed.

Her guardian had gone to bed.

Controlling her impatience only by means of a great effort, Fleurette waited, her ear pressed to the wooden partition.

She could hear the woman moving about in what was evidently an adjoining bedroom, and at last came the creak of a bed, as the heavily built custodian retired. Finally, she heard the click of an extinguished electric light.

Fleurette got up quietly, and began to dress. It did not take her long, but she could find no hat and no shoes. But she found a pair of red bedroom slippers; these would serve her purpose. A handbag, her own, lay on the cheap dressing-table. Its contents seemed to be undisturbed since she had laid it on the sofa berth in her cabin.

Dropping cigarette case and matches into the bag, Fleurette very quietly drew the curtains aside from the low square window.

It was latched, and the room, though cold, was stuffy. The latch was a difficult problem—it was a very old fitting, much worn and warped. Once, it emitted a terrifying squeak.

Fleurette stopped dead in her operations, and creeping across the room, applied her ear to the wooden partition.

Sonorous snores sounded from the adjoining bedroom.

She raised the window steadily but firmly. To her great surprise it made very little noise. She looked out and saw a neglected flower border immediately below. Then came a moss-grown, paved path leading on the right to a little pergola. This, in turn, communicated with a gate.

Fleurette dropped her bag on to the flower-bed, put on her slippers, and wriggled through the opening. It was not a particularly easy business, but Fleurette was fit and very athletic. She knew that her hands were filthily dirty and her feet muddy, when at last she stood outside; but these things did not matter.

Picking up her bag, she walked quickly around to the gate, opened it, and found herself in a narrow, hedge-bordered lane.

An oak tree overhung it a few paces back on the left—there were other dark buildings ahead. But in none of them did any light show. She looked around her eagerly, sniffing the cold night air, then climbed the opposite bank and saw that where the ground fell away, there were farm buildings, beyond, backed by trees, and beyond these trees, evidently several miles beyond, a searchlight moved regularly. This, she decided, was an aerodrome.

It was utterly, horribly, mysterious, for she should have been far out in the Mediterranean, whereas the very scent of the air told her that she was in England!

In one direction, the lane terminated, beyond the cottage from which she had come, at a gate, with a stile. She decided to proceed the other way. The lane was very roughly paved; and now, banks of cloud suddenly obscured the moon.

She was forced to walk slowly, for trees overhung the way and it was very dark. She passed two other buildings lying back from the lane on her right, but they showed no signs of life and she pressed on. She came to a wider lane, much better paved, hesitated whether to turn left or right, and finally decided upon right.

From the position of the moon and the darkness in the houses she passed (and these were few,) she realized that it must be late at night, how late, she could only guess.

On the corner of the second lane there was a large house surrounded by a high brick wall; also a post box and an electric lamp standard.

She pulled up, breathing quickly. She had reached a main road.

The lodge of some large residence directly faced her; but, whilst she had been hurrying along, she had been thinking clearly. She heard the sound made by the approach of a heavy vehicle; and presently came the glare of its headlights.

A green motor bus pulled up directly by the lodge gates.

There were very few passengers, but she saw that at least two were alighting. She raced across.

In the light of the standard lamp she read upon the side of the bus: “Reigate—Sutton—London”.

As she sprang on to the step, the vehicle restarted. The conductor helped her on board.

“Are you going to London?” she asked, breathlessly.

“Yes, miss. This is the last bus.”

CHAPTER 42

NAYLAND SMITH REFUSES

IN THE DEPTHS below Sam Pak's the furnace roared hungrily.

Sterling groped his way back through imaginary horrors to the real and greater horror of his actual surroundings.

If he had ever doubted, he knew now what his end was to be. He believed that he was no greater coward than the average man, but just as life with Fleurette had beckoned to him so sweetly, it must end. And what an end!

"Are you all right?" came a shaky whisper from the darkness.

It was Sergeant Murphy.

"Yes, thank you, Sergeant."

"We're in hell before our time, sir."

Sterling tried to control his nerves, to concentrate upon one thing to the exclusion of all others. He must not give this fiendish maniac the satisfaction of seeing him quail. If a woman could meet death as Fah Lo Suee had met it, then—by heaven!—it was up to the Middle West to show its mettle!

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith." The tones of that implacable voice fell upon Sterling like a cold douche. "The hour of our parting has come."

There was a pause; a guttural order.

The sound of a groan from the darkness where Nayland Smith lay, completed the horror of the scene. It was a groan of defeat, of bitter humiliation; then:

"Dr. Fu Manchu," came Smith's voice, and—to Sterling it seemed a miracle—its tone was steady, "order your human baboon to untie my ankles. I prefer to walk to death rather than to be carried. This, I think, I am entitled to ask."

Another order was spoken rapidly. There was a faint scuffling sound—and Nayland Smith walked into the circle of light before the furnace door.

"Oh, my God!" Murphy whispered. "What are they doing up there. Why don't they break through?"

The Burmese executioner followed Sir Denis out of the shadows, and stood at his elbow.

"Because in your long battle with me, Sir Denis," Dr. Fu Manchu continued, stressing now a note of insane exaltation, "you have always observed those rules of clean warfare which, rightly or wrongly, are an English tradition, I respect you. I, too, have traditions to which I have always adhered."

Nayland Smith, his hands behind him, stared up into the darkness which concealed the speaker.

"I bear you no personal animosity; indeed, I admire you. I have won—although my triumph may have come too late; and, therefore, Sir Denis, I offer you the Lotus Gate of escape."

"I thank you, but I decline."

Sterling struggled on to his elbow, watching, and listening.

"He's playing for time, Murphy! Can't we do anything to help him?"

"What can we do?"

"You prefer the sword? The end of the common criminal?"

"I decline that also, if I have any choice."

"You reduce me——" there was repressed frenzy now in the tones of Dr. Fu Manchu—"to the third alternative . . . the fire."

There followed a moment of silence which Sterling knew that if he lived, he should never forget. Nayland Smith stood in the circle of light, motionless, looking upward. Beside Sterling, Murphy was breathing so heavily that he was almost panting in his suppressed emotion.

"Is there no other alternative?"

"None."

An order was spoken—one sibilant word. The Burman sprang forward. . . .

CHAPTER 43

CATASTROPHE

NOW EVENTS BEGAN to move rapidly to that astounding conclusion which, although it was the result of men's combined efforts, seemed to Sergeant Murphy, a devout Roman Catholic who had begun to pray fervently, to be an intervention by a Higher Power.

Sir Denis Nayland Smith in the course of his long career as a police officer, had studied assiduously whenever opportunity offered, those branches of practical criminology with which his work had brought him in contact, East and West. He was something of a physician, understanding poisons and antidotes. Lock combinations had no mysteries for him, and there were few locks he could not force if called upon to do so. Knot-tying in all its intricacies, as practised by the late Harry Houdini, he had studied in Rangoon, his professor being a Chinese malefactor who was a master of the art.

When the ape-like Burman had come to tie him up, Smith had recognized at a glance that physical resistance was out of the question. It would have called for three powerful men and trained wrestlers at that to deal with him. His peculiar development warned Smith that the man was an expert in the art of ju-jitsu, which, together with his herculean strength, set him in a class apart.

Fah Lo Suee had gone when the tying took place.

Nayland Smith submitted, feigning weakness. When he saw the narrow twine that was to be used, he anticipated what was coming, and permitting the man to wrench his arms behind his back, he put into practice a trick whereby many illusionists have mystified their audiences; Chinese in origin, but long well-known to professional magicians of the West.

The man tied his thumbs, as well as his wrists.

By means of maintaining a certain muscular stress during this painful operation, the result, though satisfactory to Dr. Fu Manchu's private executioner, was also acceptable to Nayland Smith.

The latter knew that he could withdraw his hands at any moment convenient to him!

The lashing of his ankles was a different matter. Here, he knew himself to be helpless, and recognized expert handiwork.

He had preceded Alan Sterling down the stairs of the shaft, slung sackwise across one incredible shoulder of the Burmese killer . . .

Now, as he stood, his arms apparently tied behind him, but his ankles unlashed, staring up to where Dr. Fu Manchu sat veiled in darkness, he was actually a free man. He held the twine which had confined his wrists tightly clenched in his left hand.

He was calculating his chances—tensing himself for what he must do.

With the exception of his automatic, his personal possessions had not been disturbed; these included a pocket knife. He had opened its most serviceable blade, and

held it now concealed in his right hand. He knew but one mode of attack calculated to give him the slightest chance against his scarcely human enemy.

If it failed, his fate could be no worse.

It was not a type of combat which he favoured; but having watched this man performing his ghastly work, he found that his scruples had fled.

As the harsh command was spoken and the monstrous Burman stepped forward, Nayland Smith sprang away, turned—and kicked with all the speed and accuracy of his Rugby forward days! He put every ounce of power in his long, lean body into that murderous kick . . .

The man uttered a roar not unlike the booming of a wounded gorilla—a creature he closely resembled—doubled up, staggered . . . and fell.

A shrill order, maniacal in its ferocity, came out of the darkness above. It was Dr. Fu Manchu speaking in Chinese. The order was:

"Shoot him!—shoot him!"

Smith ducked and darted out of the radius of light into the surrounding shadow where Sterling and Murphy lay. He almost fell over Sterling.

"Quick, quick!" he panted—"your wrists."

"I'm crocked; don't count on me. Untie Murphy."

But Smith cut the twine from Sterling's wrists and ankles.

"Stay where you are until I give the word."

He bent over Sergeant Murphy.

"Ankles first . . . now wrists."

"Thank God!" cried the detective. "At least we'll die fighting!"

There was a flash in the darkness and a bullet spat on the floor close beside the speaker.

"Can you walk, Sterling?"

"Yes."

A second shot, and a second bullet whistled by Nayland Smith's ear. The voice of Dr. Fu Manchu, high-pitched and dreadful, came again, still speaking in Chinese.

"The lights, the lights!" he screamed.

Detective-sergeant Murphy, not too sure of cramped muscles, nevertheless set out through the darkness in the direction from which those stabs of flame had come.

Light suddenly illuminated the pit . . .

Dr. Fu Manchu stood upon the stairs, his clenched fists raised above his head, his face that of one possessed by devils. A wave of madness, blood lust, the ecstasy of sweeping his enemies from his path, ruled him. That great brain rocked upon its aged throne.

Murphy saw a Chinaman stripped to the waist not two paces from him. The man held an automatic: the sudden light had dazed him. Murphy sprang, struck, and fell on top of the gunman, holding down the hand which held the pistol. A second Asiatic, similarly armed, was running forward from the foot of the stairs. The Burmese strangler writhed on the floor before the furnace.

“Kill them! kill them!” cried the maniacal voice.

Nayland Smith raced forward and threw himself down beside the struggling men—just as another shot cracked out.

The bullet grazed Murphy’s shoulder.

He inhaled sibilantly, but hung on to the Chinaman. Smith wrenched the weapon from the man’s grasp. He pulled the trigger as he released it, but the bullet went wide—registering with a dull thud upon some iron girder far up the shaft.

The second Chinaman dropped to his knee, took careful aim, and fired again. But he pulled the trigger a decimal point too late.

Nayland Smith had shot him squarely between the eyes.

Dr. Fu Manchu’s mania dropped from him like a scarlet cloak discarded. His face became again that composed, satanic mask which concealed alike his genius and his cruelty. He descended three steps.

The place was plunged in darkness.

Fiery gleams from chinks in the furnace door pierced the gloom; one like an amber spear struck upon the contorted face of the Burman, lying now apparently unconscious where he had fallen.

Then came the catastrophe.

A booming explosion shook the place, echoing awesomely from wall to wall of the pit.

“My God!” cried Murphy, grasping his wounded shoulder, “what’s that?”

The words were no sooner uttered than, heralded by a terrifying roar, a cataract of water came crashing down the shaft.

“The river’s broken through!” cried Sterling.

Above the crash and roar of falling water:

“Head for the stair!” shouted Nayland Smith. “All head for the stair!”

CHAPTER 44

AT SCOTLAND YARD

THE COMMISSIONER of Metropolitan Police stood up as Dr. Petrie was shown into his room at New Scotland Yard.

The Commissioner was a very big man with an amiable and slightly bewildered manner. His room was a miracle of neatness; its hundred and one official appointments each in its correct place. A bowl of violets on his large writing desk struck an unexpected note, but even the violets were neatly arranged. The Commissioner, during a distinguished Army career, had displayed symptoms of something approaching genius as an organizer and administrator. If he lacked anything which the Chief of the Metropolitan Police should possess, it was imagination.

"I am glad to meet you, Dr. Petrie," he said, extending a very large hand. "I know and admire your work and I understand why you asked to see me to-night."

"Thank you," said Petrie. "It was good of you to spare me the time. May I ask for the latest news?"

He dropped into an armchair which the Commissioner indicated, and stared at the latter, curiously. He knew that his words had not been prompted by courtesy. In matters of exact information, the man's brain had the absorbing power of a sponge—and he had the memory of an elephant.

"I was about to call for the last report, Dr. Petrie. Normally, I am not here at this hour. It is the Fu Manchu case which has detained me. Excuse me a moment—I thoroughly understand your anxiety."

He took up one of the several telephones upon the large desk, and:

"Faversham," he said, "bring the latest details of the Fu Manchu case to my room."

He replaced the receiver and turned to Dr. Petrie.

"I am naturally in a state of intense anxiety about my daughter," said Petrie. "But first, tell me—where is Nayland Smith?"

The Commissioner pulled at his moustache and stared down at the blotting-pad before him; then:

"The last report I had left some little doubt upon that point," he replied, finally, fixing penetrating blue eyes upon the visitor. "As to your daughter, Dr. Petrie, in the opinion of Sir Denis she is somewhere in London." He paused, picking a drooping violet from the bowl between a large finger and thumb, snipping off a piece of the stem and replacing it carefully in water. "The theory of the means by which she was brought here is one I do not share—it is too utterly fantastic—; but Sir Denis's record shows that in the past——" he frowned in a puzzled way—"he has accomplished much. At the moment, as you may know, he is very highly empowered; in fact——" he smiled, and it was a kindly smile, "in a way—in regard to this case, I mean he is, in a sense, my senior."

The Commissioner's weakness for parentheses was somewhat bewildering, but Petrie, who grasped his meaning, merely nodded.

“I am very anxious about Sir Denis at the moment,” the Commissioner added.

There was a rap on the door, and in response to a gruff “Come in,” a youngish man entered, immaculately turned out in morning dress; a somewhat unexpected apparition so long after midnight. He carried a cardboard folder under his arm.

“This is Wing Commander Faversham,” the Commissioner explained, staring vaguely at the newcomer, as though he had only just recognized him. “Dr. Petrie’s name will be familiar to you, Faversham. This is Dr. Petrie.”

Faversham bowed formally, and laid the folder open upon the table. Although the Commissioner’s manner seemed to invite familiarity, it was a curious fact that none of his subordinates ever accepted that illusive lead.

“Ah!” said the Commissioner, and adjusting spectacles, bent and read.

“This brings us up-to-date, Dr. Petrie,” he said, in a few moments, looking up and removing his glasses. “Sir Denis, and Detective-sergeant Murphy—attached to the Criminal Investigation Department—visited a restaurant in Limehouse to-night, posing as sailormen. Sir Denis——” he added, in parentheses,—“has a gift for make-up. For my own part I don’t believe in disguise at any time or in any circumstances. However—Chief detective-inspector Gallaho, one of the best men we have here—you agree with me, Faversham?——”

“Absolutely, sir.”

“Chief detective-inspector Gallaho was in charge of raiding operations, assisted by . . .” there was a momentary pause, but the wonderful memory functioned . . . “Inspector Forester of the River Police branch.”

“So I understand,” said Petrie eagerly, “but what happened?”

“The agreed signal was given,” said the Commissioner, slowly, “and the party entered the premises. But the suspects had slipped into some underground cellar, and I regret to say—for no such report has ever reached me—that an iron door was encountered.”

“An iron door?”

“I was notified by Detective-sergeant Trench, at——” he readjusted his glasses and turned over a page in the folder—“11.49 p.m. Detective-sergeant Trench,” he added, laying his glasses upon the blotting-pad, “is attached to the Flying Squad—that Gallaho was proceeding to the Kinloch Works in Silvertown in order to secure expert advice upon the forcing by explosives of this iron door, or of the wall adjoining it.”

“You will notice, sir,” said Faversham, coughing respectfully, “that a party with chemical equipment according to your instructions, left at 12.15.”

The Commissioner nodded.

“I have noted this,” he replied. “The latest news, then, Dr. Petrie——” he fixed his rather tired looking blue eyes upon the latter—“is this: Sir Denis Nayland Smith, presumably accompanied by Detective-sergeant Murphy, is, we must assume, a prisoner in the cellars of this place; and according to a report received not more than ten minutes ago, from Chief detective-inspector Gallaho, experts from the explosive works were about to blast a way through the concrete wall, adjoining the iron door. The party to which wing Commander Faversham refers had not then arrived.”

He paused, folded up his spectacles and placed them in a green leather case.

"I am strongly disposed," he said, slowly, "since this is a case of major importance, to proceed to Limehouse myself; unless definite news is received within the next five minutes. Should you care to accompany me, Dr. Petrie?"

CHAPTER 45

THE MATCH SELLER

FEY STARED REFLECTIVELY down from the bay window to where beyond the misty Embankment, the Thames flowed. A small steamer was passing, and Fey found himself calculating how long a time must elapse before that steamer would be traversing Limehouse Reach.

To-night, he was assured, his monotonous duty was also a useless duty. These yellow devils knew that Sir Denis was in Limehouse, but stoically Fey continued to smoke the large briar, and to walk up and down in accordance with orders. Dr. Petrie had set out for Scotland Yard not long before. It was trying, even to so patient a man, to stand so near the edge of the arena and yet be unable to see what was going on.

Fey was worried.

He had not said anything to the doctor, but through glasses from a darkened bedroom window, he had been studying an old match seller whose place of business on the Embankment almost immediately faced these flats.

Sir Denis, before leaving on that mysterious affair which still occupied him, had told Fey to watch this man and to note what he did. The man did nothing for five minutes or so, merely remaining seated against the parapet. Then he stood up.

Since Fey had assumed him to be a cripple, this was a surprise. But almost immediately, the match vendor sat down again.

Fey continued to watch.

One of those derelicts who haunt this riverside thoroughfare came shuffling along, paused for a moment, talking to the man seated on the pavement, and then retraced his steps.

Fey had been wondering, right up to the time of Dr. Petrie's arrival, if this had been a mere coincidence, or if it had been a signal to a second watcher that there was something to report. For the entrance to the mansions was visible from that point, and Fey was disposed to believe that Sir Denis, in spite of his disguise, had been recognized as he went out that way, and that the news of his departure had been passed on.

His theory was confirmed shortly after Dr. Petrie's departure.

At about the time that the doctor would have been walking down the steps, the match seller stood up again . . . and again the derelict shuffled along, spoke to him and disappeared.

The match seller was in his usual position again, now, but Fey from time to time slipped into the adjoining room and inspected him through binoculars. Had orders not forbidden it he would have slipped out and had a closer look at this suspicious character. However, he had discovered something.

The apartment was under close observation—and to-night the enemy was aware that Sir Denis was not at home; aware, furthermore, that Dr. Petrie had been and had gone . . .

Dimly Fey detected the sound made by the opening of the lift gate, and knew from experience that someone was alighting on that floor. He stood still for a moment listening.

The door bell rang.

He went out into the lobby, placing his pipe in an ash-tray on a side table, and opened the door.

Fleurette Petrie stood there, her hair wind-blown, her face pale!

He observed that she wore a walking suit with the strange accompaniment of red bedroom slippers. They were combing the slums of Asiatic Limehouse for her, and here she was!

Fey's heart leapt. But his face betrayed no evidence of his joy.

"Oh, Fey!" she exclaimed, "thank heaven I have got here!"

"Very pleased to see you, Miss," said Fey composedly.

He stood aside as she entered, noiselessly closing the door. Her excitement, intense but repressed, communicated itself to him. Its effect was to impose upon him an almost supernatural calm.

"Is Sir Denis in, Fey?"

"No, Miss. But your father was here less than twenty minutes ago."

"What!"

Fleurette seized Fey's arm.

"My father! Oh, Fey, where has he gone? He must be in a frightful state of mind about me. And of course, you had no news for him."

"Very little, but I tried to reassure him."

"But where has he gone, Fey?"

"He rang up the Commissioner, Miss, and then went across to interview him."

"He may still be there. Could you possibly get through for me, Fey?"

"Certainly. I was about to suggest it. But can I get you anything?"

"No, Fey, thank you. I am so anxious to speak to my father."

Fey bowed and went out into the lobby. Fleurette, tingling with excitement, crossed the room and stared out of the bay window down at the misty Embankment. She retraced her steps, and stood by the lobby door, too anxious even to await Fey's report. He had just got through to Scotland Yard, and:

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith's man speaking," he said. "Would you please put me through to the Commissioner's office?"

There was an interval which Fleurette found barely endurable, then:

"Yes, sir. Sir Denis Nayland Smith's man speaking. Dr. Petrie left here recently to call upon the Commissioner, and I have something urgent to report to him."

"Bad luck," said a voice at the other end of the wire; it belonged to Faversham, the immaculate private secretary. "Dr. Petrie and the Commissioner proceeded to Limehouse not more than five minutes ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you, sir."

“What is it?” Fleurette whispered. “Isn’t he there?”

“Just gone out with the Commissioner. But excuse me a moment——” He spoke into the mouthpiece again. “Would it be possible, sir, to reach them at their destination?”

“Yes,” Faversham replied. “It’s some kind of store. I’ll instruct the people downstairs to get in touch with the officer in charge. Do you wish him to give Dr. Petrie any particular message?”

Fey hesitated for a moment, and then:

“Yes, if you don’t mind, sir,” he replied. “Tell Dr. Petrie that his daughter has returned.”

“What!” Faversham exclaimed. “Are you sure? Where is she?”

“She’s here, sir.”

“Good God! I’ll get through immediately; this is splendid news!”

“Thank you, sir.”

Fey replaced the receiver, and came out of the lobby.

“Excuse me one moment, Miss,” he said.

He went into the adjoining room and focussed his glasses upon that spot far below where the itinerant match vendor plied his trade.

The man was standing up—and at the very moment that Fey focussed upon him, he sat down again!

The same mysterious pantomime was repeated. The loafer shuffled up, exchanged a few words with the other, then slunk away again.

Fey placed the glasses on the table, and returned to the sitting-room.

Fleurette had thrown herself into an armchair and was lighting a cigarette. She felt that she needed something to steady her nerves. The mystery of that hiatus between her parting from Alan on the steamer and her awakening in that little Surrey cottage, was terrifying.

“Excuse me, Miss,” said Fey. “But did you by any chance go to the window a moment ago? I mean, just as I went out to the telephone?”

“Yes.” Fleurette nodded. “I did. I remember staring down at the Embankment, thinking how desolate it looked.”

Fey nodded.

“Why do you ask, Fey?”

“I was only wondering. You see I am sort of responsible for you.”

Very thoughtfully, but to Fleurette’s great amazement, he went out into the lobby, took up a large briar pipe, lighted it, and began with an abstracted air to walk up and down the room. Astonishment silenced her for a moment, and then:

“Fey!” she exclaimed. “Are you mad?”

Fey took the pipe from between his teeth, and:

“Sir Denis’s orders, Miss,” he explained.

CHAPTER 46

GALLAHO EXPLORES

A STIFLED BOOM of an explosion snapped the tension which had prevailed in Sam Pak's shop from the moment that the man from Kinloch's had finally been satisfied about the position of the charge, to that when, up there on the street level, he had pressed the button.

The time occupied in these methodical preparations had driven Gallaho to the verge of lunacy, and now:

"Come on!" he shouted, making for the head of a descending stairway concealed behind the curtain at the end of the bar. "There's been time for a hundred murders. Let's hope we're not too late!"

The stairway led to a kitchen in which was the ingenious door which in turn communicated with that long underground corridor. The masked door was open now and a length of cable lay along the passage.

"Wait for the fumes to clear," came a voice from behind.

"Fumes be damned!" growled Gallaho; then: "Hell! what's that?"

A black jagged hole appeared in the wall beside the iron door. A bluish acrid vapour showed in the torchlight. But at the moment that the party led by Gallaho entered the passage-way, there came from somewhere beyond the iron door a rending crash as if a battering ram had been driven through concrete.

Now, hard upon it, followed an awful sound of rushing waters echoing, roaring down into some unsuspected depth!

Part of the wall above and to the right of the gap collapsed, and water began to spray out into the passage . . .

"I was afraid of this—did I not warn you?" The voice was Schumann's. "This place is below tidal level. It is the Thames breaking in!"

"God help them!" groaned Trench, "if they're down there!"

Ignoring the vapour and the drenching spray, Gallaho, shining the ray of his torch ahead, ducked, and peered through the jagged opening.

"Be careful! the whole place may collapse!"

The spectacle before the detective was an awe-inspiring one.

Within a foot of his right hand, a smooth torrent of yellowish water poured out of some unseen gap, crashed upon a dim structure of wood and iron beneath, and from thence leapt out into the darkness of an incredible pit.

His iron nerve was momentarily shaken.

The depth indicated by the tumult of that falling water staggered him. Trench entered behind Gallaho.

"Stand clear of the water!" the latter bellowed in his ear. "It would sweep you off like a fly!"

He shone the powerful light downwards. There were wooden stairs in an iron framework. The torrent was breaking upon the first platform below, and thence descending, a great, shimmering, yellow coil, to unknown depths. Others were pushing through, but:

"Stand back!" Gallaho shouted. "There's no more room between the water and the edge!"

Trench pressed his lips to Gallaho's ear.

"This must be the shaft leading down to the tunnel," he yelled. "But no one could pass that platform where the water is falling."

Gallaho turned and pushed the speaker back through the opening into the passage. Startled faces watched them climbing through.

"Forester!" he cried. "Up to the room in the wooden outbuilding. We want all the rope and all the ladder you have!"

"Right!" said Forester, whose usually fresh colouring had quite deserted him, and set off at a run.

Gallaho turned to Trench.

"Did you notice the heat coming up from that place?"

Trench nodded, moistening his dry lips.

"And the smell?"

"I don't like to think about the smell, Inspector," he said, unsteadily.

At which moment:

"Inspector Gallaho!" came a cry, "you're wanted on the telephone upstairs."

"What's this?" growled Gallaho and ran off.

It was possible to make oneself heard in the corridor, and:

"I believe that place leads down to hell," said Trench. "If so, it will run the Thames dry."

"What's the inspector's idea about a rope ladder, Sergeant?"

"I don't know, unless he thinks he can swing clear of the waterfall to a lower platform. He's a braver man than I am if he is going to try it."

There were muttered questions and doubtful answers; fearful glances cast upward at the roof of the passage. Schumann and the works manager had gone out and around to the river front, to endeavour to locate the spot at which the water was entering the cellars.

And now, came Merton, the ex A.B. trailing a long rope ladder. As he reached the passage-way he pulled up, brushing perspiration from his eyes, and:

"Here I say!" he exclaimed, staring at the spray-masked gap beside the iron door. "I'm not going in there for anybody!"

"You haven't been asked to," came Gallaho's growling voice.

All turned as the detective-inspector came along the dimly lighted passage with his curious, lurching walk.

"Any news?" Trench asked.

“The Old Man’s on his way down.” (The Old Man referred to was the Commissioner of Police.) “Dr. Petrie’s with him—the girl’s father.”

“Whew!” whistled Trench.

“The queer thing is, though, that the girl’s turned up.”

“What!”

“She’s at Sir Denis’s flat; they had the report at the Yard only a few minutes ago.”

He divested himself of his tightly fitting blue overcoat, and, turning to Merton:

“I want you to come through there with me,” he said, “because you understand knots and ropes, and I can rely on you. I want you to lash that ladder where I’ll show you to lash it.”

“But I say, Gallaho!” Forester exclaimed . . .

“Unless, of course,” said Gallaho ironically, “you consider, Inspector Forester, that this properly belongs to your province.”

CHAPTER 47

THE WATERSPOUT

STERLING GROPED HIS WAY through darkness in the direction of the foot of the stairs. The roar of falling water was deafening. At one point he was drenched in spray, and hesitated. A small ray shone through the gloom, hitherto unbroken except for stabs of yellowish light through chinks in the furnace door. He turned sharply, aware from the pain in his chest that he was fit for little more.

The light came nearer and a grip fastened upon his arm. Close to his ear:

"Around this way—we can't reach the steps direct."

The voice was Nayland Smith's.

A pocket-torch had been amongst the latter's equipment, and now it was invaluable. Using it sparingly, Nayland Smith indicated the edge of a great column of water which was pouring down into the pit, so that anywhere within ten feet of it one was drenched in the spray of its fall. A rushing stream was pouring down the tunnel, the entrance to which they were now passing.

Even as Sterling, horrified as he had never been in his life, stared along that whispering gallery, a distant lantern went out, swept away by the torrent.

Then they turned left; and, stumbling onwards, presently Sterling saw the foot of the wooden steps. But Dr. Fu Manchu was not there.

His lips close to Sterling's ear:

"It's only a matter of minutes," shouted Nayland Smith, "before the water reaches that ghastly furnace. Then . . . we're done!"

Spray drenched them—a sort of mist was rising. The booming of the water was awful. Sterling had been along those rock galleries cut beneath Niagara Falls: he was reminded of them now. This was a rivulet compared with the mighty Horseshoe Fall; but, descending from so great a height and crashing upon concrete so near to where they stood, the effect was at least as dreadful.

Into the inadequate light, penetrating spray and mist, of Nayland Smith's pocket-torch there stumbled a strange figure—a drenched, half-drowned figure moving his arms blindly as he groped forward.

It was Murphy!

Suddenly, he saw the light, and sweeping his wet hair back from his forehead, he showed for a moment a white blood-stained face in the ray of the torch.

From that white mask his eyes glared out almost madly.

Nayland Smith turned the light upon his own face, then stepping forward, grasped Murphy's arm.

Far above, a dim light shone through the mist and spray. It revealed that horror-inspiring shaft with its rusty girders, and the skeleton staircase clinging to its walls: this, eerily, vaguely, as a dream within a dream. But it revealed something else:

That ever-increasing cataract descending from some unseen place, spouted forth remorselessly from one of the upper platforms!

No human being could pass that point. . . .

Nayland Smith staring upward flashed the feeble light of his torch in a rather vain hope that it would be seen by those at the top of the shaft; for that at long last a raiding party had penetrated, he was convinced.

The light above became obscured in ever-increasing mist; it disappeared altogether.

Much of that stair which zigzagged from side to side had remained mantled in impenetrable shadow during the few seconds that light had shone through at the head of the pit. If Fu Manchu and those of his servants who remained alive were on the stairs, they were invisible.

To one memory Nayland Smith clung tenaciously.

Dr. Fu Manchu at the moment that his killings had been interrupted, had descended three steps and extinguished the lamps. Somewhere, hereabouts, there was a switch.

Feverishly, nursing the limited power of the torch, he began to search for this switch. The din of falling water was numbing: one's brain almost refused to function. Murphy and Sterling were groping up the steps; he signalled to them to proceed higher. He continued his search for the switch.

Suddenly, he came upon it, and reversed it.

There was no result.

The explosion had disconnected the current.

He glanced back ere beginning to climb. Water was creeping up to the first step. Spray and mist obstructed his view of the furnace. He wondered if the Burmese horror, to whom human life meant no more than wood to a circular saw, had triumphed over injury, or if he was doomed to be swallowed in that unnatural tide.

Smith started up the stairs.

He was planning for the imminent catastrophe, nor thinking any further ahead than the moment when the rising water should reach the furnace. He had placed the direction of the fall, and knew that except at one point where the waterspout came perilously near to the stairs, these were navigable to within one stage of the top.

Beyond that point, progress was impossible—and the volume of water was increasing minute by minute.

His feet were wet when he began to mount. The tunnel must be full, now, right to the dead end. It was only a question of time for this forgotten shaft to be filled to its brim.

Sterling was breathing heavily and Sergeant Murphy was giving him some assistance, when Nayland Smith caught up with them on the stairs.

He shouted in Sterling's ear:

"Did that yellow swine crock you?"

Sterling grasped his arm and gripped it strongly, pressing his lips to the speaker's ear.

"It's only my wind," he explained; "otherwise O.K."

Smith who had momentarily snapped his torch on, snapped it off again, nursing the precious light. Fighting against the brain-damning clamour of falling water, he tried to estimate their chances.

He guessed that now the tunnel would be full. The flood would rise in the shaft at least a foot a minute. Failing inspiration on the part of the police, ultimate escape was problematical.

But he was thinking at the moment of that white hot furnace when steam was generated. That one point on the stairs almost touched by the waterspout was the only possible shelter. That an explosion there in the depths might wreck the entire shaft, was a possibility which one could not calculate.

Up they went, and up, until the spray cut off by an iron girder lashed them stingingly. Nayland Smith pressed the switch of his torch.

Sterling had sunk down upon the step—Murphy was supporting him. Smith bent to Murphy's ear.

"Stay where you are!" he shouted.

He groped his way upward.

CHAPTER 48

GALLAHO BRINGS UP THE REAR

"Is IT FAST?" shouted Gallaho.

"It's fast," Merton shouted back, "but you're not going down there!"

Gallaho bent to Merton's ear.

"Mind your own bloody business, my lad," he roared. "If ever I want your advice I shall ask for it."

Chief detective-inspector Gallaho climbed over the hand rail and began to descend the rope ladder, his bowler hat firmly screwed on to his bullet skull. Immediately, he was drenched to the skin.

Steam was rising from the shaft. The touch of the water was icy, numbing. But he knew that unless the ladder was too short he could reach a point of the staircase just below that ever-increasing cataract, and follow it down. He was a man with a clear-cut idea of what duty demanded.

The ladder proved to be of ample length. Gallaho gained the wooden steps, flashed his powerful torch, and saw that he stood near the waterfall thundering down into those unimaginable depths.

A faint light flickered far below.

Gallaho, his torch in his left hand, held well clear of his body, directed its ray towards that spot of light visible through the mist.

At first, what he saw was no more than a moving shadow, then it became concrete; and in the light, haggard, staggering, he saw Sir Denis Nayland Smith!

Gallaho ran down the intervening steps, and as the light showed more and more clearly the lean angular features, the detective saw the ghost of a smile break through their haggardness.

An unfamiliar wave of emotion claimed him. He threw his arm around Sir Denis's shoulder, and, shouting:

"Thank God I've found you, sir!" he said.

Smith bent to his ear.

"Good man!" he replied.

"The others, sir?"

Nayland Smith indicated the steps below, and Gallaho lighting the way, the two began to descend. A sheet of water swept the point at which Smith had left Sterling and Sergeant Murphy.

Their situation had become untenable and they had mounted half-way up to the next platform. Smith's chief worry was concerned with Sterling who was obviously in bad shape. But the sight of Gallaho afforded just that stimulus which he required. And the detective, throwing an arm around him to help him upwards, and recognizing that he was nearly spent, had an inspiration.

Bending close to his ear:

“Stick it, sir!” he shouted. “Your friend Miss Petrie is safe and well in Sir Denis’s flat!”

That stimulant was magical.

Nevertheless, the rope ladder, now nearly submerged in the ever widening waterspout, taxed Sterling to the limit. Murphy followed up behind. Merton, at the top, when collapse threatened, at the critical moment craned over and hauled Sterling to safety.

Nayland Smith came next—Gallaho truculently having claimed the right to bring up the rear.

He had earned that perilous honour.

The men in the brick passage-way broke into unorthodox cheers; nor did Forester check them.

“All out!” cried Nayland Smith. “Anything may happen when the furnace goes!”

The passage already was an inch deep in water, but they retreated along it, Gallaho and Nayland Smith last of the party.

They had reached the masked door in Sam Pak’s kitchen when the furnace exploded. Steam belched out of the corridor as from a huge exhaust. The ancient building shook.

Nayland Smith turned to Gallaho and very solemnly held out his hand.

CHAPTER 49

WAITING

"NOTHING TO REPORT," said Inspector Gallaho.

Nayland Smith nodded and glanced at Alan Sterling seated smoking in the armchair. It was the evening of the sixth day after the subterranean explosion in Chinatown, an explosion which had had several remarkable results.

The top of that forgotten pit leading down to the abandoned tunnel was actually covered, as later investigations showed, by the paved yard which adjoined Sam Pak's restaurant. The ventilation shaft passed right through his premises; and there seemed to be a distinct possibility that the old house as well as the wooden superstructure, were actually part of the abandoned workings, modified and adapted to their later purpose.

A great crack had appeared in one wall of the restaurant. But no other visible damage appeared upon the surface.

Something resembling a phenomenal tide had disturbed Limehouse Reach that night, and was widely reported from crafts upon the river. The shaft with its horrible secrets was filled to within fifteen feet of the top.

Even allowing for secret getaways communicating with adjoining premises, it was reasonable to assume that neither Dr. Fu Manchu nor any of those attached to his service had escaped alive from the fire and flood.

A cordon had been thrown around the entire area with the coöperation of the River Police. Of old Sam Pak and the other Asiatics who had been in the Sailors' Club, nothing had been seen. A house to house search in the yellow light of dawn satisfied Gallaho that they were not concealed in the neighbourhood. Nothing came of these researches to afford a clue to the mystery.

A guarded communication was issued to the newspapers under the Commissioner's direction, to the effect that in forcing a way into suspected premises a buttress had collapsed and an old tunnel working been flooded by the river.

Fleet Street suspected that there was a wonderful story behind this communiqué, but the real story if ever discovered was never published.

Mrs. Sam Pak was let off with a fine and had been covered assiduously ever since. Her movements had afforded no clue to those who watched her. She accepted the disappearance of her aged husband as philosophically as she had accepted his presence. She was permitted to re-open the shop but not the Sailors' Club.

Enquiries at Dovelands Cottage, Lower Kingswood, revealed the fact that the place belonged to a Mrs. Ryatt, who lived in Streatham and who used it in the summer but let it when possible during the winter months.

The place had been vacant for a long time, but had recently been leased by a gentleman whose address proved to be untraceable, for the convalescence of his daughter who had had a nervous breakdown. Mrs. Ryatt had actually visited the cottage on the evening that her new tenant entered into occupation, and reported that the

daughter was an uncommonly pretty girl whose manner was very strange; and the nurse in charge an elderly foreign woman of rather forbidding appearance.

She had been satisfied, however, of the respectability of her tenant and had returned to London.

No trace of the woman described by Mrs. Ryatt and by Fleurette could be found. . . .

Nayland Smith, tugging at the lobe of his ear, walked up and down the room. He glanced several times at a large clock upon the mantelpiece; then:

"I expected no news, Gallaho," he said, rapidly. "Yet——"

"Surely you have no doubts left, sir?"

Sterling stared eagerly at Sir Denis, awaiting his reply.

"Fleurette's manner disturbs me," snapped the latter. "She seems to have inherited from her mother a sort of extra sense where Dr. Fu Manchu is concerned. It is no doubt due, in both cases, to the fact that he has subjected Fleurette—as he subjected Karamanèh—to hypnotic influence at various times."

Sterling moved cautiously in the armchair. He was nursing an injured rib.

"In fact," Smith went on, "I never feel entirely happy about her, when she is not here, actually under my own eyes."

"Dr. Petrie, her father, is with her," Gallaho growled.

"I agree, she could not be in better hands. It's just an instinctive distrust."

"Based upon her queer ideas, sir?" Gallaho went on in a puzzled way.

He had assumed his favourite pose, one elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

"Surely her manner is to be expected in one who has suffered the sort of things that she has suffered. I mean——" he hesitated, seeking for words—"it will naturally take some little time before she gets over the idea that her movements are controlled. Now that I know her history, I think she is simply wonderful."

"You are right, Inspector," said Sterling, warmly. "She *is* wonderful. If you or I had been through what Fleurette has been through I wager we should be stretcher cases."

"You are probably right," said Gallaho.

Nayland Smith, his back to the room, stood staring out of the window. He was thinking of the itinerant match seller, who beyond any shadow of doubt had been a spy of Dr. Fu Manchu. Key's report of what had happened down there on the Embankment on the night of the destruction of the Thames tunnel, frequently recurred to his mind, but the match seller—like the other mysterious servants of the Chinese doctor—had disappeared; all enquiries had failed to establish his identity.

He was said to have traded there for many years, but there was some difference of opinion on this point between constables patrolling that part of the Embankment. Nayland Smith was inclined to believe that the original vendor had been bought out, or driven out, and that an understudy made up to resemble him had taken his place.

Suddenly turning:

"Switch the lights up, Gallaho, if you don't mind," he said.

The lofty, homely room became brilliantly illuminated.

"Ah!" muttered Gallaho—"this will be the doctor and the young lady."

The faint but familiar sound of the lift gate had arrested his attention. A moment later, Fey opened the outer door. The voice of Fleurette was heard—as she came running in, followed by Dr. Petrie.

She was very lovely, and ignoring Petrie's frown, Sterling struggled to his feet.

"Please sit down, dear!" Fleurette pressed her hands on his shoulders. "No! you must rest."

"But I feel so rottenly guilty."

"I know it's a shame that this big darling has to come pottering around all the shops with me," said Fleurette, laughingly. "But there are so many things I want before we leave for Egypt. The longer we stay the more I shall want! And I don't believe he really minds." She linked her arm in Petrie's and leaned her head upon his shoulder. "Do you?"

"Mind?" he said, and hugged her. "It's a joy to be with you, dear. And although Alan is temporarily crocked, it's only right that you should get out sometimes, after all."

"I suggest cocktails," said Sir Denis, his good humour quite restored; and was about to press a bell when the ringing of the telephone in the lobby arrested him in the act.

"*I* can make cocktails," said Fleurette, gaily. "I'll make you one none of you has ever tasted before, if you'll just wait until I take my hat off."

She ran out. Petrie watched her with gleaming eyes. This miraculous double of his beautiful wife had brought a new happiness into his life, keen as only a joy can be which one has relinquished for ever.

Fey rapped upon the door, and in response to Nayland Smith's snappy "Come in," entered.

"Yes, Fey, what is it?"

"There's a P. C. Ireland on the telephone, sir; he says you know him—and he has something which he believes to be important to tell you."

"Ireland?" Gallaho growled. "That's the constable who was on duty at Professor Ambroso's house on the night this business started."

"A good man," snapped Nayland Smith. "I marked him at the time."

He went out to the lobby.

CHAPTER 50

THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

"STRANGELY LIKE old times, Smith!"

Nayland Smith stared at Petrie. Gallaho, bowler worn at a rakish angle, sat on the seat before them in the Scotland Yard car.

This was one of those nondescript nights which marked the gradual dispersal of the phenomenal fog of 1934. There was a threat in the air that the monster might at any moment return. The car was speeding along beside a Common. Lamps gleamed yellowly where roads crossed it. One could see, through gaunt, unclothed trees, a distant highroad.

"Yes," Smith returned. "Some queer things have happened to us, Petrie, on that Common."

"The queerest thing of all is happening now," Petrie went on. "The inevitable cycle of it is almost appalling. Here we are, after all the years, back again in the same old spot."

"Sir Denis pointed out to me this queer cycle, doctor, which seems to run through our lives," Gallaho said, glancing back over his shoulder. "I've thought about it a lot since. And I can see, now that over and over again it crops up. I suppose Sir Denis has told you that we were actually in your old room early last week?"

"Yes," said Petrie, and stared vaguely from the window.

There came a silent interval.

Sterling had been deposited in his apartment at a hotel in Northumberland Avenue. "You are under my orders, now," Petrie had said, "and I don't want you out on this foul night. I dislike that cough. Lie down when you have had something to eat. I shall of course come and see you when I return. . . ."

The doctor had been loath to leave his daughter at Sir Denis's flat, where they were staying. But recognizing how keenly he wanted to go, Fleurette had insisted. "I have victimized you all the afternoon, dear; I think you deserve an hour off. I shall read until you come back. . . ."

"This may be a wild-goose chase," growled Gallaho suddenly, "but on the other hand, it may not. We've got to remember the old bloke may have been drunk or he may have been barmy. . . ."

"From what Ireland told me," said Nayland Smith, "I don't think either of those possibilities calls for consideration. Hello! Isn't this where we get out?"

The driver pulled up on a street corner and the three alighted.

This street, lined with small suburban houses, so characteristic of the outlying parts of London, vividly recalled to Petrie the days when he had practised in this very district, and when his patients had inhabited just such houses. There was a considerable stream of traffic and at some points beyond it seemed to be badly congested.

P. C. Ireland was standing in the shadow of a wall which lined the street for twenty yards or so on one side, bordering the garden of a larger house situated upon a corner

facing the Common.

"Ah, there you are, Constable," Gallaho said gruffly.

"Good evening," said Sir Denis. "All luck comes your way in this case, Constable."

"Yes, sir. It looks like it."

"Repeat," Smith directed tersely, "in your own words, what you told me on the telephone."

"Very good, sir." The man paused for a moment; then:

"There's some cable-laying job going on at the corner of the lane there which cuts across the Common; a big hole in the road and a lot of drain pipes stacked up. When the gang ceased work this evening, and the night watchman came on, I thought there was likely to be a jam with the traffic, and so I stepped across and asked him to put another red lamp on this side to show where drivers should pull out. That's how I got into conversation with him, sir. He's a bit of a character and he said—I'm sticking as nearly as possible to his own words—if all coppers were human, it might be better for some of them. I asked him what he meant by that; but when he told me the story, which I thought it was my duty to report to you——"

"You were quite right," snapped Nayland Smith.

"——I called up the inspector, and he told me to stand by as you suggested, sir; there's another man on my beat."

"We'll get the rest of the story from the night watchman," growled Gallaho.

"He's no friend of the Force, Inspector," Ireland nodded. "He might talk more if you said you were newspaper men."

"Bright lad!" growled Gallaho. He turned to Sir Denis. "Will you do the talking, sir?"

Nayland Smith nodded.

"Leave it to me."

The hole in the road with its parapets of gravel and wood blocks protected by an outer defence of red poles from which lanterns were suspended, was certainly obstructing the traffic. But at the moment that the party of three reached it, a temporary clearance had been effected, and the night watchman surveyed an empty street.

His quarters, a sort of tarpaulin cave constructed amidst a mass of large iron piping, housed a plank seat and some other mysterious items of furniture. A fire in a brazier glowed redly in the darkness, and added additional colour to that already possessed by the night watchman.

This peculiar character, who favoured a short grey beard but no moustache—his upper lip appearing to possess a blue tinge in contrast to the redness of his nose—wore the most dilapidated bowler hat which Nayland Smith had ever seen in his life, and this at an angle which startled even Inspector Gallaho. He also wore two overcoats; the outer garment being several inches shorter than the inner.

He was engaged at the moment upon the task of frying bacon in the square lid of a biscuit tin which he manipulated very adroitly with a pair of enormous pincers, obviously designed for some much less delicate task. He looked up as the three men paused, leaning on one of the red poles.

“Upon my word!” Nayland Smith exclaimed, importing a faint trace of Cockney into his accent. “You blokes do get about, don’t you?” He turned to Gallaho. “Funny I should see this chap here, to-night. Last week I saw him down in Limehouse.”

“Did you, now?” said the watchman, evidently much gratified. “I’ll say that’s funny; I’ll say more, I’ll say it’s bloody funny!”

He removed the biscuit tin skilfully, and tipped the rashers with their succulent fat on to a cracked enamel plate. He produced a knife and fork and a great chunk of bread. Standing up, he set a kettle on the fire, then sat down again, and, the plate on the plank beside him, began very composedly to eat his supper.

“Yes, it is funny,” Nayland Smith went on. “I was down there for my paper on the story of that raid in Chinatown. But all the suspects slipped away. It would be last Saturday night, wouldn’t it?”

“It would,” said the night watchman, his mouth full of hot bacon. “That would be the night.”

He dropped some tea into a tin pot, set it on the ground beside him, and continued stolidly to eat his bacon.

“A night wasted,” Nayland Smith mused aloud. “And what a night it was! What ho! the fog.”

“It certainly were foggy.”

“The blooming coppers had something up their sleeve; they kept it to themselves.”

“You’re right, mister.” He spat out a piece of bacon rind, picked it up, contemplated it critically and then threw it on the fire. “Coppers is a lousy lot!”

“Wish I’d stopped for a chat with you, that night, and a spot over the fire.” Nayland Smith leaned across the rail and passed a flask to the night watchman. “Slip a gill in your tea, I’m homeward bound with a couple of pals. I sha’n’t need it.”

“Blimey!” cried the night watchman, unscrewed the flask and sniffed the contents. “Thanks, mister. This is a bit of all right.”

“Those blasted chinks,” Sir Denis continued, “slipped out of that place as though they’d been dissolved.”

“How many, guv’nor?”

“Four, I think they were looking for.”

Mingled with the sound of whisky trickling into a tin mug, came a muted rumbling which examination of the face of the night watchman might have suggested to an observer to be due to suppressed mirth; then:

“You might have done worse than stop for a chat with me, guv’nor,” said the man, re-screwing the flask and returning it to Sir Denis.

CHAPTER 51

NIGHT WATCHMAN'S STORY

"IT WAS THIS WAY with me," the night watchman continued, endeavouring to chuckle and eat bacon at the same time, "as I told the young scab of a copper down there what come walkin' by. He says 'You've 'ad one over the eight, haven't you?' he says. See what I mean, mister?"

"I know those young coppers," snapped Nayland Smith, glancing at Gallaho. "They've got no sense."

"Sense!" The night watchman made a strong brew of tea. "What I want to know is: how do they get into the Force? Answer me that: how do they get into the Force? Well, this bloke I'm tellin' you about. . . ."

The dammed up stream of traffic was trickling slowly past the obstruction, under Constable Ireland's direction. Things were going fairly well. But nevertheless it was difficult to hear the speaker, and Nayland Smith and Gallaho bent over the red barrier, listening intently. Petrie craned forward also, his hand resting on Gallaho's shoulder.

"This bloke says to me," the night watchman repeated, " 'ad one over the eight, haven't you?' So I didn't say no more to him, except, 'Bloody good luck to me' says I, 'if I have' . . . and I adds, 'Bloody bad luck to you if you ain't'. That was what I said."

With all the care of a pharmacist preparing a prescription, he added a portion of the whisky from the tin cup to a brew of hot tea in a very cracked mug.

"I let him go—it's silly talkin' to coppers. He went away laughin'. But the laugh was mine, if I says so—but the laugh was mine! I'll tell you what I told 'im, mate—I told him what I see."

He swallowed a portion of bread and bacon.

"You're a newspaper man. Well, you'd have got your story all right, if you stopped, like you wanted to do, that night. What story I don't know, but *a* story. Here it is. I work for a firm, if you follow what I mean; I ain't a Council man—that's why I travels so much. Very well. The same firm what done this job 'ere was on the Limehouse job. . . ."

He added sugar and condensed milk from a tired looking tin, to the brew in the mug, stirred it with a piece of wood and took an appreciative sip.

"Good 'ealth, mister. Where I'm workin' in Limehouse is on West India Dock Road and not far from the corner of the old Causeway. That's where you see me, if I heard you right."

"That's it," said Smith patiently; "a grand fire you had."

"I'd got some chestnuts," chuckled the night watchman. "I remember as well as if it were an hour ago, and I'd roasted 'em and I was eating 'em. Did you notice me eating 'em?"

"No, he didn't," growled Gallaho; "at least, he never told me he did."

Nayland Smith grasped the speaker's arm.

“Oh, didn’t he?” said the night watchman, lifting a tufted eyebrow in the direction of the detective. “Well, I was. And through the fog there, what did I see? . . .”

He drank from the mug. Rain had begun to fall; the roar of the passing traffic rendered it necessary to bend far over the red pole in order to hear the man’s words. He set down his mug and stared truculently from face to face.

“I’m askin’ a bloody question,” he declared. “What did I see?”

“How the hell do I know, mate?” Gallaho shouted, in the true vernacular, his voice informed by suppressed irritation.

The night watchman chuckled. This was the sort of reaction he understood.

“ ’Course you don’t know. That’s why I ask’ you . . . I see a trap what belongs to the main sewer open from underneath. Get that? It just lifted—and first thing I thought was: an explosion! It wasn’t no further from me than”—— he hesitated,—“that bus. It was lifted right off. There’s nobody about; it’s the middle of the night. It was set down very quiet on the pavement, and what did I see then? . . .”

He took another sip from his mug; he had finished the bread and the bacon. Gallaho had sized up his witness, and:

“What did you see, mate?” he inquired.

“Here’s a story for the newspapers,” the watchman chuckled, as Nayland Smith reached across the barrier and offered him a cigarette from a yellow packet. “Thanks, mister—here’s a story!”

He succeeded in some mysterious way in lighting the cigarette from the fire in the brazier.

“A Chinaman popped up . . .”

“What!”

“You may well say ‘what’! But I’m tellin’ you. A Chinaman popped up out of the trap.”

“What kind of a Chinaman?”

Nayland Smith was the speaker, but in spite of his eagerness he had not forgotten to retain the accent.

“Looked like a Chinese sailor, as much as I could see of ’im through the fog—not that there was a lot of fog at the time; but there was some—there *’ad* been more. He took a look round. I sat quiet by my fire because, as I told that lousy cop what laughed at me, I thought for a minute I was dreamin’. Then he bent down and ’elped another Chinese bloke to come up. The second Chinese bloke was old. He was an old Chinee, he were. . . .”

“What did he wear?” Smith inquired, pulling out a note-book and pencil, casually.

“Ho, ho!” chuckled the watchman. “I thought you’d want to make some notes. He wore a kind of overcoat and a tweed cap. But although I couldn’t see his face, I know it was a very funny face—very old and ’aggard, and he were very tall——”

“Very tall?”

“That’s what I said—Very tall. Another bloke come up next——”

“Also a Chinaman?”

“Likewise Chinese, wearin’ a old jersey and trousers with his ’ead bare. He bent back like the first bloke had done, and ’auled up another Chinese——”

“Not another one,” growled Gallaho, acting up to the situation.

“Another one!” the watchman repeated truculently, fixing a ferocious glare upon the speaker, whom instinctively he disliked—“and another old ’un—” challengingly, the glare unmoved from Gallaho—“*and another old ’un! . . .*”

Nayland Smith was apparently making rapid notes; now:

“Was the other old one tall?” he inquired.

“He were not, he was just old.”

“Did you notice what he wore?”

“Listen . . .” The night watchman puffed his cigarette and then stood up slowly —“*you’re* not suggestin’ I’m barmy, are you?”

“You bet I’m not,” snapped Nayland Smith cheerfully. “You’ve given me a grand paragraph.”

“Oh, I see. Well, he wore a seedy kind o’ suit like I might wear, and an old soft hat.”

“What did they do?”

“The two younger chinks put the trap back and stamped it down. Then they all crossed the road behind my ’ut, and that’s all I know about it.”

“Didn’t you see where they went?”

“Listen, mister . . .” The watchman sat down again on his plank seat, refilling his mug from the pot and adding the remainder of the whisky to its contents. “There was nobody about. I ain’t as young as I used to be. If you saw chinks—two of ’em tough lookin’ specimens—come up out of a sewer . . . see what I mean? Do you know what I done? I pretends to be fast asleep! And now, I’m goin’ to ask *you* a question. In the circs,—what would *you* ’ave done?”

“That’s sense,” growled Gallaho.

“But you reported it to the constable on the beat when he came along?” said Nayland Smith.

“As you say, mister. And he not only give me the bird, he told me I was barmy or blind-oh. It’ll be a long time before I gives information to the bloody police again, whatever I sees—whatever I sees.”

CHAPTER 52

"I AM CALLING YOU"

FLEURETTE KNEW that Alan must not be out after dusk in this misty weather. He had developed an unpleasant cough as a result of the injuries he had received; but Fleurette had found a faith almost amounting to worship in the wisdom of Dr. Petrie, her father so newly discovered, but already deeply loved.

He had assured her that this distressing symptom would disappear when the lesion was healed.

She had not wanted Alan to go. Her love for him was a strange thing, impossible to analyse. It had come uncalled for, unwanted; she almost resented the way she felt about Alan.

The curious but meaningless peace of her previous life, her fatalistic acceptance of what she believed to be her destiny, had been broken by this love for Alan. He had represented storm; the discovery of her father had represented calm.

She knew, but nevertheless experienced no resentment of the fact, that she had been used as a pawn in the game of the brilliant man who had dominated her life from infancy. Even now, after her father and Sir Denis had opened her eyes, gently, but surely, to the truth—or what they believed to be the truth—about the Prince (for she always thought of him as the Prince) Fleurette remained uncertain.

Sir Denis was wonderful; and her father—her heart beat faster when she thought of her father—he, of course, was simply a darling. In some way which she could not analyse, her allegiance, she knew, was shared between her father and Alan. It was all very new and very confusing. It had not only changed her life; it had changed her mode of thought—her outlook—everything.

Curled up in the big armchair before the fire, Fleurette tried to adjust her perspective in regard to this new life which opened before her.

Was she a traitor to those who had reared her, so tenderly and so wonderfully, in breaking with the code which had almost become part of herself? Was she breaking with all that was true, and plunging into a false world? Her education, probably unique for a woman, had endowed her with a capacity for clear thinking. She knew that her thoughts of Alan Sterling were inspired by infatuation. Would her esteem for his character, although she believed it to be fine, make life worth while when infatuation was over?

In regard to her father, there was no doubt whatever. Her discovery of him had turned her world upside down. She resettled herself in the chair.

The Prince was fighting for her.

That strange hiatus in her life, about which the doctor had been so reticent, meant that he still had power to claim her. Now, they said he was dead.

It was unbelievable.

Fleurette found it impossible to grasp this idea that Dr. Fu Manchu was dead. She had accepted the fact—it had become part of her life—that one day he would dominate

a world in which there would be no misunderstanding, no strife, no ugliness; nothing but beauty. To this great ideal she had consecrated herself, until Alan had come.

"Little Flower . . . I am calling you!"

It was *his* voice—speaking in Chinese!

And Fleurette knew that ancient language as well as she knew French and English.

She sat bolt upright in the armchair. She was torn between two worlds. This normal, clean room, with its simple appointments, its neatness, its homeliness—the atmosphere which belonged to Sir Denis, that generous, boyish-hearted man who was her father's trusty friend; and a queer, alluring philosophy, cloying, like the smoke of incense, which belonged to the world from which Nayland Smith had dragged her.

"Little Flower—I am calling you."

Fleurette wrenched her gaze away from the fire.

In the burning logs, the face of Dr. Fu Manchu was forming. She sprang to her feet, and pressed a bell beside the mantelpiece.

There was a rap on the door.

"Come in."

Fey entered. He brought Western reason, coolness, to her racing brain.

"You rang, miss?"

Fleurette spoke rather wildly; and Fey, although his manner did not betray the fact, was studying her with concern.

"You see, Fey, I arranged to wait dinner until my father and Sir Denis came back. As a matter of fact, I am rather hungry."

"Quite, miss. Perhaps a little snack? Some caviar and a glass of wine?"

"Oh, no, Fey. Nothing quite so fattening. But if you would get me just two tiny egg sandwiches with a layer of cress—you know what I mean—and perhaps, yes, a glass of wine . . ."

"Certainly, miss, in a moment."

Fey went out.

Fleurette pulled the armchair around, so that she did not face the fire. It was a gesture—but a defensive one.

That voice—that voice which could not be denied—"Little Flower I am calling you"—had sounded, she knew, in her subconscious mind only. But *because* she knew this . . . she feared. If she had not known how this voice had reached her, she would have surrendered, and have been conquered. Because she did know, and was not prepared to surrender, she fought.

They thought he was dead . . . He was not dead.

She heard Fey at the telephone giving terse orders. She was really hungry. This was not merely part of a formula designed to combat the subconscious call which had reached her; but it would help. She knew that if she wanted Alan, that if in future she wished to live in the same wholesome world to which her father belonged, she must fight—*fight*.

She wandered across to a bookshelf and began to inspect the books. One watching her would have said that she smiled almost tenderly. Nayland Smith's books betrayed the real man.

Those works which were not technical were of a character to have delighted a schoolboy. Particularly Fleurette was intrigued by a hard-bitten copy of *Tom Sawyer Abroad* which had obviously been read and reread. Despite his great brain and his formidable personality, what a simple soul he was at heart!

Fleurette began to read at random.

". . . But I didn't care much. I am peaceable and don't get up no rows with people that ain't doing nothing to me. I allowed if the paynims was satisfied I was. We would let it stand at that . . ."

She read other passages, wondering why her education had not included Mark Twain; recognizing by virtue of her training that the great humorist had also been one of the world's great philosophers.

"Your sandwiches, miss."

Fleurette started.

Fey was placing a tray upon a small table set beside the armchair. Removing the silver cover he revealed some delicately cut sandwiches. With a spoon and fork he adroitly placed two upon a plate, removed a half-bottle of wine from an ice-bucket, uncorked it and poured out a glassful.

He set down the glass beside the plate, adjusted the armchair in relation to the fire with careful consideration, bowed slightly, and went out.

The man was so efficient, so completely sane, that no better antidote could have been prescribed in Fleurette's present mood. Mark Twain had begun the cure; Fey had completed it.

She began to eat egg sandwiches with great relish. She knew instinctively that the expedition upon which her father had gone to-night, with Sir Denis and that strange character, Inspector Gallaho, would result in the discovery of the fact that Dr. Fu Manchu had survived the catastrophe in the East End, of which she knew very little, for they had withheld details. She was disposed to believe that Gallaho, alone, had faith in the Prince's death; her father's manner betrayed doubt; Sir Denis had said nothing, but she divined the fact that until he saw Dr. Fu Manchu dead before him he would never believe that that great intellect had ceased to function.

Fleurette ate three sandwiches, drank a glass of wine, and, in a mood of contemplation, found herself staring again into the fire.

"Little Flower, I am calling you."

His voice again!

She sprang up. She knew, for she had been trained to know, that no voice really had sounded in the room. It was her subconscious brain. But . . . this she knew also—it was real—it was urgent.

Already she began to see again that glamorous but meaningless life out of which she had climbed, assisted by Alan, as a swimmer clambers out of a tropical sea. She could see it in the fire. There were snow-capped mountains there, melting into palm

groves, temples and crowded bazaar streets; a hot smell of decay and perfume—and now, all merged into two long, gleaming eyes.

She watched those eyes fascinatedly; bent closer, falling under their thraldom.

"Little Flower, I am calling. . . ."

Her lips parted. She was about to speak in response to that imperious call, when a sound in the lobby snatched her back to the world of reality.

It was the ringing of the door bell.

Fleurette stood up again and walked towards the book case. She pulled out *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, which she had replaced, and opened it at random. She read, but the words did not register. She could hear Fey crossing the lobby and opening the front door of the apartment. She did not hear any word spoken.

She thought she detected a vague scuffling sound.

Fleurette replaced the book, and stood still, very near to the door communicating with the lobby, listening. The scuffling continued; then came a dull thud.

Silence.

A wave of apprehension swept over her, turning her cold.

"Fey!" she called, and again more urgently, "*Fey!*"

There was no reply.

She ran to the bell beside the mantelpiece, pushed it and actually heard it ringing. She stood still, hands clenched, watching the door.

No one came.

"Fey!" she called again, and heard with surprise the high note upon which she called.

The door opened. The lobby beyond was in darkness. A tall man was coming in.

But it was not Fey. . . .

CHAPTER 53

POWERS OF DR. FU MANCHU

"I CAN'T MAKE this out!" said Nayland Smith.

He, Dr. Petrie and Inspector Gallaho stood before the door of the apartment. Smith had rung twice and there had been no reply.

Smith stared hard at Petrie.

"You've got the key, sir, no doubt?" Gallaho growled.

"Yes." Nayland Smith drew a bunch of keys from his trouser pocket. "I have the key, but I am wondering where Fey can have gone."

They had called on Sterling, the invalid, in his room at the hotel near by, and they had broken the unpleasant news that unless Mr. Samuel Grimes (such was the night watchman's name) suffered from a singular hallucination, it was almost certain that Dr. Fu Manchu was alive.

Petrie had attended to his patient, who was of a type difficult to handle; and with a final drink upon which the doctor had frowned severely, they had come away . . .

"Dinner for four at eight-thirty was my last order if I remember rightly," said Nayland Smith. "It's just possible, of course——" he placed the key in the lock—"that he may have gone down to the kitchen. But why doesn't Fleurette answer?"

He turned the key and swung the door open.

"Hello!" Gallaho exclaimed, "what's this?"

"My God!" groaned Petrie.

A heavy smell resembling that of mimosa swept out from the lobby to greet them, and . . . the lobby was in darkness!

Nayland Smith sprang forward, groped for the light, stumbled, and fell.

"Smith!"

Petrie rushed in behind him.

"All right!" came in the staccato fashion which characterized Nayland Smith in moments of tension. "I've fallen over . . . somebody."

Inspector Gallaho switched on the light.

Sir Denis had jumped up. He was staring down, jaws clenched, at an insensible man who lay upon the carpet.

It was Fey.

Petrie raised his hand to his brow and groaned.

"Smith," he said, in a strangled voice, "Smith! *He* has got her again!"

"Lend me a hand, Gallaho," cried Nayland Smith, savagely. "We'll get him on to the settee in the sitting-room."

The door being thrown open by Petrie, it was revealed that the sitting-room was warmly lighted. There was no one there.

Out from that lobby which reeked of mimosa, they carried the insensible man, and laid him upon the settee. He was breathing regularly, but heavily; otherwise, there was complete silence in Nayland Smith's apartment.

"Can you do anything, Petrie? You know something about this damnable drug of the Doctor's."

"I can try," said Petrie, quietly, and went out to the room which he occupied.

Sir Denis had accommodation for two guests, or, at a pinch, three. Dr. Petrie and his daughter were his guests now; and Fleurette . . . ?

Inspector Gallaho, who had forgotten to remove his bowler, removed it, not without difficulty, showing a red mark where it had been crushed down upon his bullet head.

"This is a hell of a go," he growled, tossing his hat into an armchair. "It's easy enough to see what's happened, sir. This queer smell is one, I take it, you have met with before?"

"I have," said Sir Denis, grimly.

"A powerful anaesthetic?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. Someone rang the bell, and the moment Fey opened the door, sprang on him with a pad saturated in this stuff—and the rest of the story tells itself." He began to chew phantom gum. "She's a lovely girl," he added. "It's enough to make a man burst!"

Dr. Petrie came in carrying a medicine case, and kneeling down, began to examine Fey. Gallaho went out into the lobby.

"The smell of this stuff makes my head swim," he growled.

He was looking for something which might give a clue to the identity of Fey's assailant. Nayland Smith, tugging at the lobe of his ear, was walking up and down before the open fire, watching Petrie at work; afraid to say what he thought, but suffering much of the agony of mind which he knew his old friend to be experiencing at this moment.

Some sandwiches and part of a bottle of champagne were on a table beside an armchair.

There came a strange interruption.

Someone who had a fresh, mezzo-soprano voice, began to sing very quietly in an adjoining room!

She sang in French, and one would have said that the singer was happy.

Dr. Petrie came to his feet at a bound.

"Good God, Smith!" He grasped Sir Denis's arm—"that's *Fleurette*!"

Gallaho came running in from the lobby.

"The young lady's in the flat, sir! What the devil does it mean?"

The song was interrupted from time to time, suggesting that the singer was moving about engaged upon some pleasant task, and singing from sheer lightness of heart. Under Dr. Petrie's tan it was yet possible to detect how pale he had grown.

"*I'll* go, Smith," he said.

He crossed the lobby, entered a short passage and threw a door open; Sir Denis was close behind him.

Fleurette, dressed as they had left her, was amusing herself with hats and frocks and stockings strewn all over the room, and singing lightly from time to time. She was smoking a cigarette.

"Fleurette, darling!" cried Petrie. "Thank God you are safe. Surely you heard us come in?"

Fleurette turned, a cigarette between her fingers, tossing a little green hat on to the coverlet of the bed, and staring in a vaguely puzzled way at the speaker.

There was no recognition in her eyes.

"I am waiting to be called," she said; "I may have to leave at any moment. Please let me get on with my packing."

"Fleurette!" Her father stepped forward and grasped her shoulders. "Fleurette! Look at me. What has happened here to-night?"

Fleurette smiled at him as she might have smiled at a perfect stranger; then looked past him with a puzzled frown to where Nayland Smith stood in the open doorway, his face very grim, and his eyes gleaming.

"Nothing has happened," she replied. "I don't know you, but it is very kind of you to ask. May I please go on with my packing?"

"She's hysterical," came a growling voice beyond Sir Denis. "Something that has happened here to-night has unbalanced her."

It was Gallaho.

Nayland Smith exchanged a rapid glance with Dr. Petrie. Petrie, his expression indicating that he was exercising a tremendous effort of control, shook his head. He released Fleurette and forced a smile.

"By all means go on, dear," he said. "Let me know if you want anything."

Fleurette looked up at him questioningly.

"You are so nice," she said. "I'm glad you've come, but I don't want anything, thank you."

Petrie signalled to Smith to go out. They returned to the lobby, Petrie leaving the door ajar. And as they entered it, that same singing, uncanny, now, was renewed.

"There's no other way out of this flat except through the front door, here, is there?" asked Petrie.

"No." Sir Denis shook his head. "Except through a window."

Petrie glanced at Nayland Smith; agony peeped out of his eyes.

"I don't think it's likely," he said. "That is not what I fear."

"Doctor," growled Gallaho, "this is a frightful blow. Something so horrible happened here to-night that the poor girl has lost her reason."

"Something horrible—yes," said Petrie, slowly; "but . . . she hasn't lost her reason."

Gallaho stared uncomprehendingly. Nayland Smith turned to him, and:

"If you knew all that I know of the powers of Dr. Fu Manchu," he said, "you would know that not only is he alive, but . . ."

“What, sir?”—for the speaker had paused.

“He has been here to-night. I don’t understand.” He began to walk up and down feverishly—“I don’t understand. . . .”

CHAPTER 54

GALLAHO EXPLORES FURTHER

"HAVE YOU BEEN on duty all night?"

Chief detective-inspector Gallaho stood in the hall porter's office. The hall porter, a retired sergeant-major of the Black Watch, rather resented his presence and his manner.

"Certainly; I've been on duty all night."

"I wasn't suggesting you hadn't," growled Gallaho. "I was merely asking a question."

"Well, the answer is: Yes."

"The answer is 'Yes'. Good. Now I'm going to ask you a few more questions."

The sergeant-major recognized a character at least as truculent as his own; when Gallaho was in difficulties, Gallaho's manner was far from soothing. The hall porter glanced him up and down with disfavour, and turning to a side table, began to arrange a stack of letters which lay there.

"You might as well know that I'm a police officer," Gallaho went on, "and your answers to the questions I am going to ask you may be required in evidence. So make 'em snappy and to the point."

The porter turned: he was no longer so sure of himself.

"Has something happened here to-night?" he asked.

"You are the man that should know that," said Gallaho; "so you're the man I've come to. Listen——" he leaned on the flap of the half-door; "how many apartments are there on the floor where Sir Denis Nayland Smith lives?"

"Four. Sir Denis's and three others."

"Who are the occupiers of the three others?"

"One is vacant at the moment. Another belongs to Major General Sir Rodney Orme; the third to Mrs. Crossland, the novelist."

"Are these people at home?"

"Neither of them, as a matter of fact. The General is in the south of France, and his flat is shut up; and Mrs. Crossland has been in America for some time."

"I suppose her place is shut up, too?"

"No. As a matter of fact, it isn't. But their Egyptian servant lives up there, cleans the rooms and looks after correspondence. He has been with them, I believe, for many years."

"Egyptian servant?"

"Yes, Egyptian servant."

"Is he up there now?"

"I suppose so."

"Have you seen him to-night?"

"No."

“Are there any apartments above that?”

“No; only some storerooms. The lift goes no further than Sir Denis’s floor.”

“I see.” Gallaho chewed invisible gum. “Now, has anybody been up to or down from that floor in the last few hours?”

“No. A gentleman called and asked for the General, but I told him he was abroad.”

“So no one has gone up to the top floor, or come down from the top floor during the past few hours?”

“No one.”

“People have been moving about on the other floors, of course?”

“Two or three have come down and two or three have gone up. But no one I haven’t seen before. I mean they were either residents, friends of residents, or tradespeople.”

“Quite.”

Gallaho turned, and went lounging in the direction of the lift. He paused, however, turned, and:

“Where are the kitchens?” he called; “in the basement?”

“Yes. You have to use the service lift if you want to go down there.”

“Where is it?”

“In the passage on the right.”

A few minutes later, Gallaho had stepped into a small elevator, controlled by a very pert boy.

“Kitchens,” he growled.

“What d’you mean, kitchens?” the boy inquired. “The kitchens is private.”

“My lad,” said Gallaho—“when a detective-inspector says to you—‘kitchens’—do you know what you do?”

“No, sir,” the boy replied, suddenly awed.

“You take him there, and you jump to it.”

Gallaho presently found himself in a place inhabited by men in high white caps, a hot place informed by savoury smells. His appearance created mild surprise.

“Who’s in charge, here?” he demanded, sharply. “I am a police officer, and I have some questions to ask.”

A stout man whose cap was higher and whiter than the others, came forward.

“I hope nothing’s wrong, Inspector,” he said.

“Something *is* wrong, but it’s not your fault. I only want to know one thing. You are of course acquainted with Fey, Sir Denis Nayland Smith’s man?”

“Certainly.”

“Did he order dinner to be prepared for a party to-night?”

“He didn’t. He ordered some sandwiches just before seven o’clock and they were taken up.”

“You are sure?”

“Certain.”

“Thank you.”

Gallaho lounged back to the lift.

The outrage must have taken place shortly after their departure. Otherwise, it was almost certain that Fey would have made arrangements with the chef for dinner. It seemed probable, but not certain, that no stranger had gone up to the top floor, or come down from it. But although the sergeant-major claimed to be acquainted with all those who had visited other floors, Gallaho realized that the evidence on this point was not conclusive, and:

“Have you been on duty all night?” he asked the man running the residents’ lift.

“I came on at six o’clock, sir.”

“Have you taken any strangers up or down during the evening?”

“Strangers, sir?”

They had reached the top floor, and the man opened the gate, and stood there, considering.

“There were guests came to dinner at number fourteen, and a gentleman I hadn’t seen before went up this evening with another resident, but they went out together about half-past seven.”

“Nobody else?”

“Nobody at all, sir.”

When Sir Denis opened the door to Gallaho, the latter could hear Fleurette singing in the inner room.

CHAPTER 55

MIMOSA

"I've adopted somewhat unusual methods, Smith," said Petrie, with the ghost of a smile, glancing up from where he sat beside the unconscious Fey.

"I hope to heaven they succeed," snapped Smith. "He may or may not be able to throw some light upon this business."

"During the time that I was a guest of Dr. Fu Manchu"—— Petrie was obviously talking with the idea of distracting his mind from the sound of that sweet voice singing snatches of song in an adjoining room—"the Doctor was good enough to impart to me some particulars of his preparation, Mimosa 3—probably the most remarkable anaesthetic ever invented by man. He claims for it that there are practically no evil after-effects, and of this you yourself have had evidence in the past. The patient may also be readily revived by those means which you have just seen me adopt."

And even as he spoke the words, Fey raised his drooping eyelids, staring vaguely from face to face.

"How are you, Fey?" said Petrie; "feeling better, I see. Let me help you up. I want you to drink this."

Fey sat up and swallowed the contents of the glass which Petrie held to his lips. Looking about him in a dazed way, he began sniffing.

"Funnily enough," he replied, "I feel practically all right. But I can still smell that awful stuff. Miss Fleurette?" He jumped to his feet, then sat down again. "She's safe, sir? she's safe?"

Fleurette had ceased to sing but could be heard moving about in the inner room.

"She's in her room, Fey," said Nayland Smith, shortly.

Fey's glance wandered to the large clock on the mantelpiece:

"Good God! sir," he muttered. "I've been asleep for two hours!"

"It's not your fault, Fey," replied Dr. Petrie. "We all understand. What we are anxious to hear is exactly what happened."

"Yes, sir," Fey replied. "I can understand that——" he paused, listening.

That lighthearted, sweet voice had reached him from the inner room. He glanced at Dr. Petrie:

"Miss Fleurette, sir?"

"Yes, Fey. But please go ahead with your story."

"I'd just made up my menu, sir." He glanced at Nayland Smith, who had begun restlessly to walk up and down the carpet. "I mean, I had worked out a little dinner which I thought would meet with your approval, and gone to the telephone in the lobby to talk to the chef down below. I was just about to take up the instrument when the door bell rang."

"Stop, Fey," snapped Nayland Smith. "Did you hear the lift gate open?"

"No, sir—of that I am positive."

"Go ahead."

"I'm beginning to see light," growled Gallaho.

"One moment, Fey," Nayland Smith interrupted; "this would be, I take it, some ten to twenty minutes after our departure?"

"Exactly, sir. I thought it might be one of the staff who had come up in the service lift, which can't be heard from here, or old Ibrahim, Mrs. Crossland's butler——"

"You know this man, Ibrahim?" said Gallaho.

"Yes, sir. He's an Egyptian. He's travelled a lot, as I have. He's a funny old chap; we sometimes have a yarn together. Anyway, I opened the door."

He paused. He was a man of orderly mind. He was obviously endeavouring to find words in which exactly to express what had occurred. He went on again.

"There was a tall man standing outside the door, sir. He wore an overcoat with the collar turned up, and a black felt hat with the brim pulled down. The only light in the lobby was the table lamp beside the telephone, so that I couldn't make out his features."

"How tall was this man?" jerked Nayland Smith.

"Well, unusually tall, sir. Taller than yourself."

"I see."

"He held what looked like a camera in his hand, and as I opened the door he just stood there, watching me."

" 'Yes?' I said.

"And then without moving his head, which he held down, so that I never had more than a glimpse of his features, he raised this thing and something puffed right out into my face."

"Something?" growled Gallaho. "What sort of thing?"

"Vapour, sir, with a most awful smell of *mimosa*. It blinded me—it staggered me. I fell back into the lobby, gasping for breath. And the tall man followed me in. I collapsed on the carpet where you found me, I suppose. And I remember his bending over me."

"Describe this man's hands," Nayland Smith directed.

"He wore gloves."

"As he bent over you," said Dr. Petrie, eagerly, "just before you became quite unconscious, did you form no impression of his features?"

"Yes, sir, I did. But I may have been dreaming. I thought it was the devil bending over me, sir. He had long, green eyes, that gleamed like emeralds."

"We know, now," said Sir Denis, continuing to walk up and down, "roughly what occurred. But I don't understand. . . . I don't understand."

Fleurette in the inner room sang a bar or two with the happy abandon of a child, and Fey glanced uneasily from Sir Denis to Dr. Petrie.

"What don't you understand, Smith?" the latter asked, sadly.

"Either this deathless fiend, who is harder to kill than an earwig, has employed one of his unique drugs or he has hypnotically dominated Fleurette. Whichever is the true explanation, what is his purpose, Petrie?"

There came a moment of silence. Fleurette, ceasing to sing, might be heard moving about; then:

"I think I see what you mean, Smith," Petrie replied, slowly. "He could have taken her away or he could have——"

"Exactly," snapped Sir Denis. "Why has he left her . . . and in this condition?"

"Who are you talking about, sir?" growled Gallaho.

"Dr. Fu Manchu."

"What! Do you really mean *he* has been here to-night?"

"Beyond any shadow of doubt."

"But what for?"

"That's what we are trying to work out, Gallaho." Nayland Smith was the speaker. "Frankly, it has me beaten."

"There's one line of enquiry," Gallaho replied, "which with your permission I propose to take up without delay."

"What's that?" Petrie asked.

"This tall lad, with the box of poison gas, according to the gentleman with all the medals downstairs, hasn't come into Westminster Mansions to-night, and hasn't gone out. You say yourself, Fey——" he stared at the man, chewing vigorously—"that the lift wasn't used? My conclusion is this, sir." He turned to Nayland Smith: "Dr. Fu Manchu is somewhere in this building."

Smith glanced at Petrie.

"Go and take a look at her," he said. "She's been quiet for some time. I am very anxious."

Petrie nodded, and went out.

"If the evidence of the watchman we interviewed to-night can be relied upon," Sir Denis continued—"and personally, I have no doubt on the point——"

"Nor have I, sir."

"Very well. All the men who were in that place called the Sailors' Club at the time of the tragedy, escaped by some means we don't know about. But, evidently, into a main sewer——"

"*One* seems to have been missing, sir!"

"Yes!—and I'm glad he is!" snapped Nayland Smith viciously. "The Burmese killer evidently met his end there. But that the tall man described by the witness is Dr. Fu Manchu, personally I cannot doubt."

"It certainly looks like it. But how did he get into this building? And where is he hiding?"

Dr. Petrie returned. His eyes were very sorrowful.

"Is she all right?"

He nodded.

"That yellow conjurer has got her under control," he said between clenched teeth. "I know the symptoms. I have suffered them myself. God help us! What are we going to

do?"

"What I'm going to do," Gallaho growled, picking up his bowler from the armchair where he had thrown it, "is this: I am going to step along to Mrs. Crossland's flat and have a serious chat with your friend——" he glanced at Fey—"Ibrahim."

CHAPTER 56

IBRAHIM

"I HAVE NEVER MET Mrs. Crossland," said Nayland Smith irritably, "nor her husband. One can live in a block of London flats for years and never know one's neighbours. But I am acquainted with them by sight, and also with their Egyptian servant, Ibrahim."

"What do you think of him, sir?" growled Gallaho.

"Perfectly normal, and probably very trustworthy. But it doesn't follow that he hasn't been for all his life a member of the Si-Fan."

"This Si-Fan business, sir, is beyond me."

"It has proved to be beyond *me*," said Nayland Smith, shortly.

Gallaho gave voice to an idea.

"It must be very unpleasant," he said, "to be the unknown husband of a well-known woman."

They reached the door of Mrs. Crossland's flat. Gallaho pressed the bell.

An elderly Egyptian in native dress opened the door. He was a very good Arab type and a highly ornamental servant. He stared uncomprehendingly at Inspector Gallaho, and then bowed to Sir Denis.

"This is Mrs. Crossland's flat, I believe?" said the detective.

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Crossland is abroad."

"A crime has been committed in this building to-night," Gallaho went on, in his threatening way, "and I want to ask you a few questions."

The Egyptian did not give way; he stood squarely in the doorway. It was a type of situation which has defeated many a detective officer. Gallaho knew that his ankles were tied by red tape; that he dared not, if intrusion should prove to have been unjustified, cross the threshold against the will of the man who held it.

Nayland Smith solved the situation.

Stepping past Gallaho, he gently but firmly pushed the Egyptian back, and entered the lobby.

"There are questions I want to ask you, Ibrahim," he said in Arabic, "and I wish my friend to be present." He turned. "Come in, Gallaho."

The lobby of Mrs. Crossland's flat resembled the entrance to a harêm. It was all mûshrabîyeh work and perforated brass lanterns. There were chests of Damascus ware, and slender Persian rugs upon the polished floors. Ibrahim's amiable face changed in expression; his dark eyes glared dangerously.

"You have no right to come into this place," he said in English.

And Nayland Smith, noting that he spoke in English even in this moment of excitement, recognized an unusual character; for *he* had spoken in Arabic.

Gallaho entered behind Sir Denis. He knew that the latter was not trammelled as he was trammelled; that he was strong enough to trample upon regulations.

“Close the door, Gallaho,” snapped Sir Denis; and, turning to the Egyptian: “Lead the way in. I want to talk to you.”

Ibrahim’s expression changed again. He bowed, smiled, and indicating with an outstretched arm an apartment similar in shape to Nayland Smith’s sitting-room, led the way.

Gallaho and Sir Denis found themselves in an apartment queerly exotic. The bay window which in Smith’s room admitted waves of sunlight, here was obstructed by a mûshrabîyeh screen. Dim light from shaded lanterns illuminated the place. It was all divans and brassware, rugs and cushions; a stage-setting of an Oriental interior. Mrs. Crossland’s reputation and financial success rested upon her inaccurate pictures of desert life; of the loves of sheiks and their Western mistresses.

Nayland Smith looked about him.

Ibrahim stood by the door leading into the room in an attitude of humility, eyes lowered. But Sir Denis had sized up the man and knew that the task before them was no easy one.

“You have a Chinese friend, O Ibrahim,” he said in Arabic—“a tall, distinguished Chinese friend.”

Nothing in Ibrahim’s attitude indicated that the words had startled him, but:

“I have no such Chinese friend, effendîm,” he replied, persistently speaking in English.

“You belong to the Si-Fan.”

“I do not even know what you mean, effendîm.”

“Tell me. You may as well speak now——” Sir Denis had abandoned Arabic —“since you will be compelled to speak later if necessary. How long have you been in the service of Mrs. Crossland?”

“For ten years, effendîm.”

“And here, in this flat?”

“My lady and gentleman live here for five years.”

“I suggest that Mrs. Crossland or her husband has a tall, distinguished Chinese friend, who sometimes visits here.”

“I am not acquainted with such a person, effendîm.”

Nayland Smith tugged at his ear, whilst Gallaho watched him anxiously. It was a situation of some delicacy; because, always, there was a possibility that they were wrong.

The sinister visitor with the camera-case might have been working from some other base.

“There are no other resident servants?”

“None, effendîm.”

It was an impasse. Failing some more definite clue Nayland Smith recognized the fact that despite his contempt for red tape where a major case was concerned he could not possibly force this perfect servant to give him access to the other rooms of the apartment.

He stood there tugging at his ear, and staring from object to object. The very air was impregnated with pseudo Orientalism. It held a faint tang of ambergris. He wished, now, that Petrie had been with him; for Petrie sometimes had queer intuitions. But of course, it had been impossible to leave Fleurette alone.

He glanced at Gallaho.

The latter took the cue immediately, and:

"A mistake, sir, I suppose?" he growled; and to Ibrahim: "Sorry to have troubled you."

They returned to the lobby: Gallaho had actually gone out into the corridor, when:

"This is a very fine piece, Ibrahim," said Sir Denis.

He stood before an Egyptian sarcophagus half hidden in a recess.

"So I am told, effendîm."

"Has Mrs. Crossland had it long?"

"No, effendîm." At last, the Egyptian's deadly calm was disturbed. "It was bought by Mr. Crossland in Egypt, recently. It was delivered less than a week ago."

"Beautiful example of late eighteenth," murmured Nayland Smith. "Shipped through to London, I suppose?"

"Yes, effendîm."

They were bowed out by the Egyptian. The door was closed.

"Call to the Yard the moment we reach my flat!" snapped Nayland Smith. "Have this entire block covered."

"Very good, sir. I was thinking the same thing."

"We weren't wrong—but our hands are tied."

"My idea exactly, sir."

Fey opened the door in response to their ring.

"How is Miss Petrie?" Nayland Smith challenged.

"The doctor is with her, sir."

They went in and Gallaho took up the telephone. Sir Denis walked on into the sitting-room, pacing the carpet restlessly.

Gallaho's gruff voice could be heard as he spoke to someone at Scotland Yard. Presently, Dr. Petrie came in. He shook his head.

"No change, Smith," he reported. "She declines to leave her room. She is packing, methodically, but refuses all assistance. The idea has been implanted upon her mind that a call to leave here is coming shortly. God help us if we can't find the man who imposed that thing upon her!"

"What would it mean?" snapped Smith.

"It would mean, I fear, that she would remain in this condition to the end of her life."

"The poisonous swine! He is very powerful!"

"He has the greatest brain in the world to-day, Smith."

Gallaho completed his directions at the telephone and came into the room. All idea of dinner had been brushed from their minds. There was a moment of awkward silence. Sounds of faint movement reached them: Fleurette was still engaged in her packing.

Then, the telephone bell rang.

There was something in this call coming at that moment which seemed to possess a special significance. All three waited. All three listened to Fey's voice, out in the lobby.

And presently, Fey came in.

He had quite recovered his normal self. There was nothing in his appearance or in his behaviour to suggest that he had passed through an amazing ordeal. He bowed slightly to Dr. Petrie.

"Someone wishes to speak to *you*, sir."

"What name?"

"Dr. Fu Manchu was the name, sir."

CHAPTER 57

A CALL FOR PETRIE

As Petrie crossed the lobby, Nayland Smith turned to Gallaho.

"Do you realize, Inspector," he said, "that the greatest menace to the peace of the world who has come on earth since the days of Attila the Hun, is at the other end of that line?"

"I am beginning to realize that what you say about this man is true, sir." Gallaho replied. "But I think we can trace him by this call."

"Wait and see."

He kept glancing towards the door which communicated with Fleurette's room. There was silence there. He wondered what she was doing. In this, perhaps, the incomprehensible plan of Dr. Fu Manchu reached its culmination. Nayland Smith walked to the lobby door and listened to Petrie's words.

These did not help him much, consisting principally of "yes" and "no." At last, Petrie replaced the receiver, stood up, and faced Smith.

His features were very drawn. Smith recognized how the last year had aged him.

"What am I to do?" he said, speaking almost in a whisper. "What am I to do?"

"Come in here," said Sir Denis quickly. "Gallaho wants to use the line."

Gallaho sprang to the telephone as Dr. Petrie and Nayland Smith walked into the sitting-room. They faced one another, and:

"What are his terms?" said Smith.

Petrie nodded.

"I knew you would understand."

He dropped into an armchair and stared straight before him into the embers of the open fire.

"He wants something," Nayland Smith went on, evenly, "and he demands acceptance of his terms, or——" he pointed in the direction of the door beyond which Fleurette's room lay. . . .

Petrie nodded again.

"What am I to do? What am I to do?"

"Give me the facts. Perhaps I can help you."

"It was Dr. Fu Manchu at the end of the line," said Petrie, in a monotonous voice. "Any doubts I may have had, disappeared the moment I heard that peculiar intonation. He apologized for troubling me; his courtesy never fails except in moments of madness ——"

"I agree," murmured Nayland Smith.

"He admitted, Smith, that you had made things pretty warm for him, assisted by the English and French police. Access to agents of the Si-Fan in England was denied to him—his financial resources were cut off. Of this he spoke frankly."

"Dr. Fu Manchu is always frank," said Smith, drily.

"Finally, he reached the point at which he had been aiming. He regretted that it had been necessary to make a clandestine call at this apartment; but Fleurette, the woman he had chosen for his bride" (Petrie spoke in almost a monotone) "had been torn from him. Matters of even greater urgency demanded . . ."

He paused, staring into the heart of the fire.

"Demanded *what*?" Nayland Smith asked, quietly.

He was listening—but no sound came from the room occupied by Fleurette.

"He has an exaggerated idea of my powers as a physician. He is a man of great age—God knows what age; and it appears that he is cut off from a supply of the strange elixir by means of which, alone, he remains alive. His offer is this: I am to bring him certain ingredients which he has named, and assist him in preparing the elixir, which apparently he is unable to prepare alone; or——"

"I fully appreciate the alternative," snapped Nayland Smith. "But one thing I don't quite understand. I am wondering if something else underlies it, why his need of *your* services?"

Petrie smiled unmirthfully.

"It appears that he is in a situation—he frankly admits that he is hunted—where the attendance of any physician attached to his group would be impossible. Also, it appears, the pharmaceutical details require adroit manipulation."

"What does he want you to do?"

Gallaho came in from the lobby.

"That was a Westminster call, sir," he reported. "The caller was in this area. I expect further details later."

"Excellent," murmured Nayland Smith. "Listen to this, Gallaho. Go ahead, Petrie."

"He assured me," Dr. Petrie went on, "and neither you nor I, Smith——" he looked at Sir Denis appeallingly—"has ever doubted his word that Fleurette would remain mentally his slave in the state in which she is, now, unless he chose to restore her to normal life."

"If he said so," said Nayland Smith solemnly, "I don't doubt it."

"Your job is to go, sir," said Gallaho, with a faint show of excitement. "I'll have you covered, and we'll get this yellow devil!"

"Thank you, Inspector," Dr. Petrie smiled wearily. "Where Dr. Fu Manchu is concerned, things are not quite so simple as that. You see, my daughter's sanity is at stake."

"You mean that no one but this Fu Manchu can put her right?"

"That's what I mean, Inspector."

Chief detective-inspector Gallaho picked up his hat, looked at it, and threw it down again. He began to chew invisible gum, glancing from Sir Denis to Dr. Petrie.

"Sir Denis and I know this man," the latter went on; "we know what he can do—what he *has* done. You would be entitled officially to take the steps you have

mentioned, Inspector; I can only ask you *not* to take them; to treat what I have told you as a confidence."

"As you say, sir."

"I am ordered to assemble certain drugs; some of them difficult to obtain, but none, I believe, unobtainable. The final ingredient, the indispensable ingredient, is a certain essential oil unknown anywhere in the world except in the laboratory of Dr. Fu Manchu. A small quantity of this still remains in existence."

"Where?" jerked Nayland Smith.

Dr. Petrie did not reply for a few seconds. He bowed his head, resting it in a raised hand; then:

"At a spot which I have given my word not to name," he replied. "I am to go there, and get it. And when I have collected the other items of the prescription, and certain chemical apparatus described to me, I am to join Dr. Fu Manchu."

"Where are you to join him?" Inspector Gallaho asked, hoarsely.

"This I cannot tell you, Inspector. My daughter's life is at stake."

There was another silence, and then:

"He is, then, in extremis?" murmured Nayland Smith.

"He is dying," Dr. Petrie replied. "If I can save him, he will restore Fleurette to me —on the word of Fu Manchu."

Nayland Smith nodded.

"Which in all my knowledge of his execrable life, he has never broken."

CHAPTER 58

JOHN KI

"DON'T WAKE HER," said Dr. Petrie.

He beckoned to the nurse to follow him. Outside in the sitting-room, where misty morning light was just beginning to assert itself, Nayland Smith in pyjamas and dressing-gown was pacing up and down smoking furiously. Petrie was fully dressed, and:

"Hello, Petrie!" said Smith. "You'll crack up if you go on like this."

"She is so beautiful," said the nurse, a dour Scotch woman, but as capable as all London could supply. "She is sleeping like a child. It's a strange case!"

"It is a very strange case," Petrie assured her. "But you fully understand my instructions, nurse, and I know that you will carry them out."

"You may count upon that, Doctor."

"Go back to your patient now, and report to Sir Denis, here, if there is any change when she awakens."

"I understand, Doctor."

Nurse Craig went out of the room, and Petrie turned to Nayland Smith. The latter paused in his restless promenade, puffing furiously upon a cracked briar, and:

"This job is going to crock you, Petrie," he declared. "Neither you nor I is getting younger; only Dr. Fu Manchu can defy the years. You look like hell, old man. You have been up all night, and now——"

"And now my job begins," said Petrie quietly. "Oh, I know I am stretching myself to the limit, but the stakes are very high, Smith."

Nayland Smith gripped Petrie's shoulder and then began to walk up and down again.

Petrie dropped into an armchair, clutching his knees, and staring into the heart of the fire. Fey came in unobtrusively and made the fire up. It had been burning all night, and he, too, had not slept.

"Can I get you anything, sir?"

"Yes," said Nayland Smith. "Dr. Petrie has to go out in an hour. Get bacon and eggs, Fey, and coffee."

"Very good, sir."

Fey went out.

"I haven't slept," rapped Nayland Smith; "couldn't sleep, but at least I have relaxed physically. You," he stared at Petrie, "haven't even undressed."

"No——" Petrie smiled; "but as you may have observed, I have shaved."

"A hit, Petrie. *I* haven't. But I propose to do so immediately. Take my advice. Strip and have a bath before bacon and eggs. You'll feel a new man."

"I believe you are right, Smith."

And when presently, the two, who many years before had set out to combat the menace represented by Dr. Fu Manchu, sat down to breakfast, except for asides to Fey who waited at table, they were strangely silent. But when Fey had withdrawn:

"I don't doubt," said Nayland Smith, "and you *cannot* doubt, that Fleurette would live in a borderland to the end of her days if the man who has set her there does not will it otherwise. We are compromising with a remorseless enemy, Petrie, but in this compromise I am wholly with you. Gallaho is out for the moment. He is the most fearless and the most conscientious officer I have met with in recent years. He will go far. It rests between *us* now, old man, and I suppose it means defeat."

"I suppose it does," said Petrie, dully.

"Naturally, you know where to assemble the drugs and paraphernalia demanded by Dr. Fu Manchu. You have passed your word about the place where the particular ingredient is to be found."

He ceased speaking and glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"I shall have to be going, Smith," said Petrie, wearily. "It is utterly preposterous and utterly horrible. But——"

He stood up.

Nayland Smith grasped his hand.

"It's just Fate," he said. "Dr. Fu Manchu seems to *be* our fate, Petrie."

"You don't blame me for consenting?"

"Petrie, you had no choice."

Dr. Petrie discharged his taxicab at a spot in Vauxhall Bridge Road where he had been told by Dr. Fu Manchu to discharge it. Carrying the suitcase with which he had set out from Nayland Smith's flat, and which now contained drugs and apparatus which must have surprised any physician who examined them, and which indeed surprised Dr. Petrie, he walked along that dingy thoroughfare until he came to a certain house.

It was a grey and a gloomy house, its door approached by three dirty steps.

Battersea was coming to life.

Battersea is one of London's oddest suburbs—a suburb which produced John Burns, a big man frustrated; Communist to-day, if votes count for anything, encircled in red on the Crimes' Map; yet housing thousands of honest citizens, staunch men and true. A queer district—and just such a district as might harbour an agent of Dr. Fu Manchu.

Laden tramcars went rocking by, bound cityward. There were many pedestrians. Battersea was alert, alive—it was a nest of workers.

But of all this Dr. Petrie was only vaguely conscious: his interest lay far from Battersea.

He went up the three steps and rang the bell.

In response to his ringing, the door, presently, was opened by a very old Chinaman.

Petrie stared at an intricate map of wrinkles which decorated that ape-like face. Memory bridged the years; he knew that this was John Ki, once keeper of the notorious

“Joy Shop” in the older Chinatown, and now known as Sam Pak.

A sort of false gaiety claimed him. He had gone over to the enemy, become one with them, and accordingly:

“Good morning, John,” he said; “a long time since I saw you.”

“Velly much long time before.”

The toothless mouth opened in a grin, and old Sam Pak ceremoniously stood aside, bowing his visitor in.

Petrie found himself in a frowsy, evil-smelling passage, the floor covered with worn and cracked linoleum; hideous paper peeling from the walls. There was a room immediately on the left, the door of which was open. He entered, heard the front door close, and the old Chinaman came in behind him.

This was a room which had apparently remained untouched, undecorated and undusted since the days of Queen Victoria. Upon a round mahogany table were wax flowers under a glass case; indescribably filthy horsehair chairs; a carpet through which the floor appeared from point to point; a large print on one wall representing King Edward VII as Prince of Wales, and a brass gas chandelier hanging from the centre of a ceiling of the colour of Thames mud.

Petrie set down his suitcase very carefully on the floor, and turned to Sam Pak.

“What now, John?”

“Waitee, please; go be long yet.”

The aged creature went out; and Petrie, staring through indescribably dirty lace curtains upon the prospect outside, saw a Morris car pull up.

It was driven by a man who wore a tweed cap, pulled well down over his eyes, but who almost certainly was an Asiatic . . .

Old Sam Pak, better known to Dr. Petrie as John Ki, returned.

He was carrying a small steel casket. He handled it as though it had been a piece of fragile Ming porcelain, and with one skinny hand indicated the suitcase.

Petrie nodded, and unfastened the case.

A quantity of cotton waste was produced by Sam Pak from somewhere, and wrapped around the steel receptacle; this was then deposited in the case, and the case was closed.

“Key?”

The aged Chinaman extended upon one skinny finger a curiously shaped key attached to a ring.

“Keep—velly particular.”

“I understand.”

Dr. Petrie took it, placed it in his note-case and returned the note-case to his pocket.

Sam Pak signalled from the window and the driver of the Morris came up the steps.

He carried the suitcase out to the car.

“Very careful, my man!” called Petrie, urgently; and realized that, for the first time in his life, he was interested in the survival of Dr. Fu Manchu.

He was indifferent to his destination. He lay back in the car and dully watched a panorama of sordid streets.

CHAPTER 59

LIMEHOUSE

THAT STRANGE JOURNEY terminated at a small house in Pelling Street, Limehouse.

The driver of the Morris, who might have been Chinese, but who more probably was a half-caste, jumped down and banged on an iron knocker which took the place of a bell.

The door was opened almost immediately, but Petrie was unable to see by whom.

His driver's behaviour during this long and dismal journey had been eccentric. Drizzling rain had taken the place of fog, and the crowded City streets under these conditions would have reduced a Sam Weller to despair. Many byways had been explored for no apparent reason. The driver constantly pulled up, and waited, and watched.

Dr. Petrie understood these manoeuvres.

The man suspected pursuit, and was anxious to throw his pursuers off the track.

Now he signalled to Dr. Petrie to come in. Petrie climbed out of the car and walked into the open doorway.

"The bag?" he said.

"Leave now," the driver replied; "get presently."

"Those are my orders, Dr. Petrie," came in a cultured voice.

And Petrie found that a Japanese gentleman who wore spectacles was smiling at him out of the shadows of the little passage-way.

"If those are your orders, good enough."

The driver went out; the door was closed. And Petrie followed the Japanese to a back room, the appointments of which aroused him from the lethargy into which he was falling.

This might have been a private room in an up-to-date hairdresser's establishment, or it might have been an actor's dressing-room. All the impedimenta of make-up was represented and there was a big winged mirror set right of the window. The prospect was that of a wall beyond which appeared a number of chimneys.

"My name is Ecko Yusaki," said the man who wore spectacles, "and it is a great privilege to meet you, Dr. Petrie. Will you please sit in the armchair, facing the light."

Petrie sat in the armchair.

"Your interests are not the same as my own," the smooth voice continued, and Mr. Yusaki busied himself with mysterious preparations; "but they are, I imagine, as keen. I am one of the most ancient brotherhood in the world, Dr. Petrie—the Si-Fan." (He made a curious gesture with which Petrie was unpleasantly familiar) "and at last my turn has come to be useful. I am——" he turned, displaying a row of large, gleaming teeth—"a specialist in make-up, but recently returned from Hollywood."

"I see," said Petrie. "Regard me as entirely in your hands."

Thereupon, courteously, and with a deft assurance which spoke of the enthusiast, Mr. Yusaki set to work.

Petrie submitted, closing his eyes and thinking of Fleurette, of his wife, of Nayland Smith, of Sterling, of all those caught in the mesh of the dreadful Chinese Doctor.

At last, Mr. Yusaki seemed to be satisfied, and:

"Please glance at this photograph, Dr. Petrie," he said . . . "No! one moment!" he snatched the photograph away . . . "Through these!"

He adjusted tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles over Petrie's ears.

Petrie stared at a photograph nearly life size which the Japanese was holding before him. It was that of a man apparently grey-haired, who wore a moustache and a short pointed beard, and who also wore spectacles; a sad looking man nearer sixty than fifty, but well preserved for his years.

"You see?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Please look now in the mirror."

Petrie turned to the big mirror.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Good God!"

He saw the original of the photograph—yet the face at which he looked was his own!

Speech failed him for a moment, and then:

"Who am I?" he asked, in a dull voice.

"You are a member of the Si-Fan——" Again the respectful gesture resembling the Roman Catholic Sign of the Cross—"who to-day is making a great sacrifice for the Cause. My part is done, Dr. Petrie—except for a small change of dress; and the car is waiting. . . ."

CHAPTER 60

DR. PETRIE'S PATIENT

WHEN THE *Queenstown Bay* came to her berth, Dr. Petrie was one of the first visitors aboard.

Shortly after he reached the deck, endeavouring to recall his instructions, an elderly Egyptian, wearing European dress, approached him. The usual scurry characterized the docking of the liner; stewards and porters were rushing about with baggage; visitors were looking for those they had come to meet; cargo was being swung out from the holds; and drizzling rain descended dismally upon the scene.

"Dr. Petrie!"

The man spoke urgently, close to Petrie's ear.

"Yes."

"My name is Ibrahim. Please—your dock check."

Petrie handed the slip to the Egyptian.

"Please wait here. I shall come back."

He moved along the deck, and presently disappeared amongst a group of passengers crowding towards the gangway.

Petrie felt that he was in a dream. Yet he forced himself to play his part in this grotesque pantomime, the very purpose of which he could not comprehend: the sanity of his daughter was at stake.

Ibrahim rejoined him. He handed him a passport.

"Please see that it is in order," he said. "You have to pass the Customs."

Petrie, inured to shock, opened the little book; saw a smaller version of the photograph which Mr. Yusaki had shown to him, gummed upon the front page; and learned that he was a Mr. Jacob Edward Crossland, aged fifty-five, of no occupation, and residing at 14, Westminster Mansions!

The extent and the powers of the organization called the Si-Fan were so amazing that he had never succeeded in getting used to them. No society, with the possible exception of the Jesuits, ever had wielded such influence nor had its roots so deeply set in unsuspected quarters.

He could only assume that Mr. Crossland, husband of the well-known woman novelist, was one of these strange brethren: assume, too, that Mr. Crossland would slip ashore as a visitor.

And—what?

Disappear from his place in society? Yusaki had said he was making a great sacrifice for the Cause. It was all very wonderful and very terrifying.

"I have tipped the stewards, effendîm—and your baggage is already in the Custom House. Will you please follow me? . . ."

Dr. Petrie walked down the ladder wearing a white raincoat which he had acquired at the house of Mr. Yusaki, and a grey hat of a colour and style which he detested.

Apparently, Mr. Crossland travelled light. A small cabin-trunk and a suitcase lay upon the Customs bench. The cabin-trunk he was requested to open. Ibrahim produced the necessary key, displaying wearing apparel, a toilet case, books and other odds and ends. The two pieces were passed. The porter hired by Ibrahim carried them out towards the dock gates.

"Be careful, please," the Egyptian whispered.

Detective-inspector Gallaho and Sergeant Murphy were standing at the gate!

Nothing quite corresponding to this had ever occurred in Petrie's adventurous life. He had joined the ranks of the law breakers!

He must play his part; so much was at stake. He must deceive his friends, those interested, as he was interested, in apprehending the Chinese physician. If his nerve, or the art of Mr. Yusaki should fail him now—all would be lost!

The critical gaze of Gallaho was fixed upon him for a moment, then immediately transferred to Ibrahim.

Petrie passed the detective, forcing himself not to look in his direction. A taxicab was waiting upon which the pieces of baggage were loaded, under the supervision of Ibrahim. Petrie observed with admiration that his own suitcase had already been placed inside.

He knew now where his course lay, and his amazement rose by leaps and bounds.

The presence of Gallaho at the dock gates was explained. The police were covering the Crossland flat. The man, when he had left that morning, had naturally been followed. He was regarded as a factor so important in the case that Gallaho had covered in person. Gallaho would be disappointed. The cunning of the group surrounding Dr. Fu Manchu exceeded anything in Petrie's experience.

He glanced at the placid, elderly Egyptian seated beside him, and:

"How long have you belonged to the Si-Fan?" he asked, speaking in Arabic.

Ibrahim shrugged his shoulders.

"Sir," he replied in the same language, "it is not possible for me to reply to your questions. Silence is my creed."

"Very sound," Petrie murmured, and gave it up.

His sentiments when he reached Westminster, and was greeted respectfully by the hall porter as Mr. Crossland, were of a kind inexpressible in any language known to man.

Then, as he stepped out of the elevator—Nayland Smith was standing on the landing!

Petrie suppressed an exclamation. One piercing stare of those blue-grey eyes had told him that he was recognized.

But Smith gave no sign, merely bowing and stepping aside as Ibrahim busied himself with the baggage.

Three minutes later, Dr. Petrie stood in the pseudo-Oriental atmosphere of the Crossland flat, and Ibrahim closed the door behind him.

"Please wait a moment."

The Egyptian walked through the harêm-like apartment which opened out of the lobby, and disappeared.

Petrie had time to wonder if the authoress of the celebrated novels of desert love also was a member of the Si-Fan, or if this must be counted a secret of her husband's life which she had never shared. He wondered what part this man normally played in their activities, and doubted the nationality of Crossland.

Surely no man entitled to his name could link himself with a monstrous conspiracy to subject the Western races to domination by the East?

Above all, to what reward did Crossland look which should make good the loss of his place in the world of decent men?

"If you will please come this way, sir."

Ibrahim, who had carried out the precious suitcase, now returned without it, and stood bowing before Petrie.

Petrie nodded and followed the Egyptian across that shaded room with its mûshrabîyeh windows, and through a doorway beyond, which, in spite of the Oriental camouflage, he recognized to correspond with one in Nayland Smith's apartment.

He found himself in a large bedroom.

The Eastern note persisted. The place, viewed from the doorway, resembled a stage-set designed by one of the more advanced Germans for a scene in Scheherazade. The bed stood upon a dais; its posts were intricately carved and inlaid, and a canopy of cloth of gold overhung its head. A low couch he saw, too, and a long, inlaid table of Damascus work. Upon this table chemical apparatus appeared, striking a strange note in that apartment. He noted that the contents of his suitcase had been added to the other materials upon the table.

And, in the bed, Dr. Fu Manchu lay. . . .

Petrie stared, and stared again, unable to accept the evidence of his own senses.

Less than two months had elapsed since he had seen the Chinese doctor. In those two months, Fu Manchu had aged incredibly.

He was shrunken; his strange, green eyes were buried in his skull; his long hands lying on the silk coverlet resembled the hands of a mummy. The outline of his teeth could be seen beneath drawn lips. To the keen scrutiny of the physician, the truth was apparent.

Dr. Fu Manchu was dying!

" 'O mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low?' " came sibilantly through parched lips. "I observe, Dr. Petrie, that this beautiful passage from an otherwise dull play is present in your mind . . . You honour me."

Petrie started, felt his fists clenching. The body of Fu Manchu was in dissolution, but that phenomenal brain had lost none of its power. The man still retained his uncanny capacity for reading one's unspoken thoughts.

"I must harbour what little strength remains to me," the painful whisper continued. "For your daughter's health of mind and body, you need have no fear. I was compelled, since there is still work for me if I can do it, to impose a command upon her. It nearly exhausted my powers, which are dwindling minute by minute."

The whispering voice ceased.

Petrie watched that strange face, but no words came to him. In it he had seen, as others had seen, a likeness to the Pharaoh, Seti I—but to the Pharaoh as one imagined him in his prime. Now, the resemblance to the mummy which lies in Cairo was uncanny.

Ideas which his scientific mind rejected as superstitious, danced mentally before him. . . .

What was the real age of this man?

"I have removed the command which I imposed upon her," the whistling voice continued, "because I have accepted your word, as you have always accepted mine. Your daughter, Dr. Petrie, is restored to you as you would wish her to be. I shall never again intrude upon her life in any way."

"Thank you!" said Petrie—and wondered why he spoke so emotionally.

He was thanking this cold-blooded, murderous criminal for promising to refrain from one of his many crimes! Perhaps the secret of his sentiment lay in the fact that he knew the criminal to be one whose word was inviolable.

"I have taken these steps——" Fu Manchu's voice sank lower—"because with all your great skill, which I respect, your assistance may have come too late."

He paused again. Petrie watched him fascinatedly.

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith has succeeded for the . . . first time in his life in sequestering me from most of those resources upon which normally . . . I can draw. . . . In these circumstances I was compelled to forego one . . . of the periodical treatments upon which my continued . . . vitality depends. . . . I was then cut off from the material. My present condition is outside my experience . . . I cannot say if restoration . . . is possible. . . ."

Complete resignation sounded in the weak voice.

"In the absence of Dr. Yamamata . . . who usually acts for me, but who unfortunately at present is in China . . . there is no other physician known to me who could possibly . . . assist—in any way. I shall be obliged, Dr. Petrie, if you will give the whole of your attention to . . . the written formula which lies . . . upon the table. Any error would be fatal. . . . Only one portion of the essential oil remains in the phial contained in the . . . steel casket. . . ."

He ceased speaking and closed his eyes.

His hands had never moved; it was like listening to a dead man speaking from the grave.

CHAPTER 61

THE CROSSLANDS' FLAT

"Detective-inspector Gallaho, sir," Fey announced.

It was approaching evening when Gallaho called on Nayland Smith; and, entering the lobby, he wrenched his bowler off, threw it on to a chair and walked into the sitting-room.

"Hullo, Gallaho!" said Sir Denis. "A devil of a row going on in the corridor?"

"Yes, sir. The vacant flat has been let—to an Indian Army gentleman, I believe. His stuff is being moved in."

"You've checked up, I see!"

"Well——" Gallaho leaned on the mantelshelf—"I've got a man posted at each of the four exits, and I've sized up the workmen from Staple's depository on the job. Nobody is going to slip out in the confusion—that is, nobody over six feet in height that I don't know!"

"Efficient work, Inspector."

Gallaho stared, chewing invisible gum.

"I have come to a certain conclusion, sir," he declared. "What I do about it depends upon your answer to a question I am going to ask."

"What's the question?" snapped Nayland Smith.

"It's just this, sir: who's in charge of this Fu Manchu case?"

"I am."

"Good enough. That means I am under your orders, definitely."

"Definitely."

"That saves me a lot of trouble," sighed Gallaho, leaning upon the mantelpiece. "Because I have certain theories, and I can't act upon them without your instructions."

He paused, and seemed to be listening.

"I know what you're listening for," said Sir Denis. "But I am very happy to be able to tell you, Gallaho, that Miss Petrie is entirely restored. The nurse installed by Dr. Petrie insists that she shall remain in bed. But there isn't really the slightest occasion for it. Mr. Sterling and the nurse are with her now. She is completely normal."

"That's an amazing thing," growled Gallaho.

Nayland Smith stared past him as if at some very distant object, and then:

"The powers of the mind *are* amazing," he said, quietly. "But this theory of yours, Gallaho?"

"Well, sir, my theory is this: that slimy old Arab, Ibrahim, went out this morning and I followed him. I took Murphy along in case we had to split up. He went to West India Dock, and went on board a liner in from Jamaica. He came ashore again, with his employer, Mr. Crossland."

"I know," Sir Denis interrupted. "I met them here, as they arrived."

"Oh, I see. . . ." Gallaho stared very hard. "Well, in my opinion, there's something funny about it. You see, sir, I had some inquiries made about Mr. Crossland. His wife's in New York. That's certain—I mean the woman who writes the books. But Mr. Crossland himself was last heard of in Madeira."

"He might have joined the ship at some port of call."

"He might," Gallaho replied. "In fact, he must have done. But it's very funny. Except the Egyptian, nobody has come out of that flat since we visited it. . . . I'm wondering who's still inside——"

Nayland Smith did not answer for some moments, then:

"You mean, Gallaho," he said, "that you don't think the man who is now presumably in Mr. Crossland's flat, is really Mr. Crossland at all?"

"I suppose I must be mad," growled Gallaho, almost rubbing his elbow into the mantelpiece. "His passport was obviously in order; he was accepted by the servants downstairs here, and he was met by Ibrahim, who took charge of his baggage. I suppose I must be barmy. But there's something about it that isn't right. I can't put my finger on the weak spot—but I wish I had your authority to barge into Mr. Crossland's flat. I think I should find something."

Nayland Smith walked up and down in silence, but at last:

"In my opinion, you are right, Inspector," he replied. "If my opinion is of any value, I regard you as a man brilliantly equipped for his chosen profession."

Detective-inspector Gallaho became definitely embarrassed.

"You apparently don't know the meaning of fear, although you have an active imagination. I owe my life to this singular combination, and this, I shall never forget."

"Thank you, sir."

"The present Commissioner and myself do not see eye to eye, but I don't dispute his brilliance as an organizer. What I mean is this, Gallaho; you have hit the nail on the head."

Gallaho, watching the speaker, was chewing assiduously, and now:

"Am I to understand, sir," he asked, "that you agree with my view of this case?"

"I do."

"You mean you have reason to suppose, as I have reason to suppose, that the proper course, in the interests of justice, would be to secure powers to examine the flat of Mr. Crossland?"

"Exactly."

There was a further interval of silence. Tramcars rocked upon their way, far below. Some vague hint of activity upon the river reached that high apartment.

"I take it, sir, you are officially in charge?"

"I have told you so."

"And you don't wish Mr. Crossland's apartment to be searched?"

"Definitely, I forbid the step."

"Very good, sir."

Gallaho's eyes strayed in the direction of the door which communicated with the room occupied by Fleurette.

"You see," said Nayland Smith, "you are not dealing with a common criminal. You are dealing with the Emperor of Lawbreakers. Dr. Petrie and myself have worked side by side for many years, opposing this man's monstrous plans. I have never succeeded in bringing him to justice. There are reasons why I can do nothing at the moment—nothing whatever. . . ."

He fixed his keen eyes upon Inspector Gallaho.

"I understand, sir. When do I get the O.K.?"

"When Dr. Petrie rejoins us."

CHAPTER 62

COMPANION CROSSLAND

INTO THE ORIENTAL BEDROOM dusk had crept. Long ago Ibrahim had turned the lamps on.

Petrie had lost identity: he was merely a physician battling with the most difficult case ever entrusted to him. He sat beside Dr. Fu Manchu, holding the lean, yellow wrist and registering the pulse; watching the mummy-like face, wondering if he had committed any error, and hoping——yes, hoping—that success would crown his hours of effort!

Under no obligation whatever, for no man who had ever met him had doubted the word of Fu Manchu, he was battling to save the life of this monster, this octopus whose tentacles, stretching out from some place in Asia, touched, it seemed, the races of the world. He was cherishing a plague, fanning into life again an intellect so cold, so exact, that the man in whose body it was set could sacrifice his own flesh and blood in the interests of his giant, impersonal projects.

For one insane moment, the glamour of the Si-Fan swamped common-sense. Petrie found himself questioning his own ideals; challenging standards which he believed to be true. Definitely, the world was awry; perhaps it was possible that this amazing man—for that he was an outstanding genius, none could deny—had a plan to adjust the scheme of things "nearer to the heart's desire".

How could he know?

Weighed in the balance with the mandarin doctor, he was a negligible quantity. Perhaps the redemption of mankind, the readjustment of poise, could only be brought about by a remorseless, steely intellect such as that of Dr. Fu Manchu. Perhaps he was a fool to fight against the Si-Fan . . . Perhaps the Si-Fan was right, and the Western world wrong!

Night had come, and upon its wings had descended again that demon Fog. Wisps streaked the room. . . .

And the night wore on—until ghostly spears of dawn broke through the shaded windows.

Dr. Fu Manchu suddenly opened his eyes!

Their brilliant greenness was oddly filmed; a husky whisper reached Petrie's ears:

"Success!"

He had never believed that he could touch without loathing the person of the Chinese physician, but now, again, he tested his pulse, and as he did so:

"You observe the change?" the weak voice continued. "I have challenged Fate, Dr. Petrie, but again I have won. The crisis is past."

Petrie stared at him in amazement. Not only his pulse, but his voice, indicated a phenomenal return of vitality.

"The life property—which is the sun," said Dr. Fu Manchu, "revivifies swiftly. You are surprised."

The queer film left his eyes. It appeared to the amazed stare of Petrie that the hollows in those yellow cheeks already were filling out. . . .

"Of the Western physicians whom chance has thrown in my path, I have not yet met your peer. You are a modest man, Dr. Petrie. True healers are rare—but you are one of these. If ever you join me it will be voluntarily. From this day onward you have nothing to fear from any plans I may deem it necessary to undertake."

The treatment which Dr. Petrie had administered to Fu Manchu was one which, personally, he should have described as imbecile. The B. M. A. would have disowned any physician employing such measures. He had been unable to discover any element of sanity, any trace of unity, in the drugs which he had been directed to assemble.

The queer oil, with its faint violet tinge, was the only element in the strange prescription which he could not identify. Yes; it was magic!—something transcending the knowledge of the Western world!

Dr. Fu Manchu was growing younger, hour by hour. . . .

Petrie watched the miracle; and, in the full light of morning:

"You are amazed, Dr. Petrie." The harsh voice was beginning to regain its normal quality. "Any physician of Europe or America would be amazed. Perhaps you do not realize, even yet, that the old herbalists were not all mad. There is an essential oil—you have used it to-night—which contains those properties the alchemists sought. It is the other ingredients, and they are simple, which convert it into that elixir vitæ found only once in the Middle Ages."

He sat up!

Petrie started back. Before the Fu Manchu against whom he had fought for so many years, the vital, powerful Fu Manchu, he found himself an enemy. He faced a menace which had all but wrecked his own happiness; which yet might wreck the structure of Western society.

"My compliments, Dr. Petrie. I had not overestimated your accomplishments."

Ten years—twenty years—a hundred years—had been shed by the speaker, as a snake discards its old skin. The man who now sat upright in the bed fixing the gaze of his green eyes upon Dr. Petrie, was a phenomenon; the Phœnix had arisen from its ashes.

A vision of what this might mean to the world crossed Petrie's mind:—a battle-piece red with blood and violence; a ghastly picture of death and destruction.

"You have played your part honourably," said Dr. Fu Manchu.

He reached out a long, yellow hand, and pressed a bell. Ibrahim entered—and, realizing the miracle which had taken place, prostrated himself upon the carpet and pronounced a prayer of thanksgiving.

There were sounds of movement in the corridor outside. Vaguely, Petrie recalled that a similar disturbance had occurred during the previous evening—but it had reached him as through a fog.

Ibrahim was followed by a man wearing morning dress a clean-shaven man whose lined face seemed out of keeping with his jet black hair. At Dr. Petrie—who still wore the make-up imposed by Mr. Yusaki—this man stared amazedly.

“This is Companion Crossland,” said Dr. Fu Manchu sibilantly. “His counterfeit presentment intrigues him. Companion Crossland has resigned his place in the world which knew him. I am ready.”

He moved towards the door.

“Ibrahim will assist you to resume your normal appearance. I ask for your word that you will remain here until Ibrahim tells you it is time to go.”

“I agree.”

“Dr. Petrie, I salute you—and bid you farewell. . . .”

CHAPTER 63

A LACQUER CABINET

RELAYS OF DETECTIVES had been on duty all night, watching every exit from the building. Nayland Smith was pacing up and down the sitting-room when Gallaho was announced. He had paced up and down all night. Fleurette, ignoring the orders of the nurse, had joined him. She was curled up in the big armchair. Alan Sterling had 'phoned twice.

"Any news, sir?"

"No."

Gallaho leaned on the mantelshelf.

"It's beginning to occur to me that we may be wrong."

"Always a possibility, Gallaho. . . ."

The detective taking reports from the men on duty, had observed that the remainder of the incoming tenant's furniture was being delivered. A secretary, wearing smart morning dress, had taken charge of operations. One of Staple's large green vans was outside the service entrance; a smaller one was drawn up behind it.

"Those mahogany chairs," the secretary had said as Gallaho had lingered for a moment, "and the large lacquer cabinet are to be brought down again. There is no room for them. Put them on the small van. . . ."

"I mean," Gallaho went on doggedly, "we may have been barking up the wrong tree. There's the possibility . . ."

The door bell had been ringing, but Gallaho had failed to hear it. Fey had opened the front door. And now:

"Darling!" cried Fleurette—

She leapt from the armchair and threw herself into her father's arms. . . .

For Dr. Petrie had walked in!

Fleurette broke down completely.

She was still crying like a little child, but crying happily, when a small covered van which had left the building some ten minutes before was pulled up in a builder's yard in Chelsea.

A man wearing a morning suit and a soft black hat got down from his place beside the driver and ran around to the rear of the van. Its load consisted of a set of mahogany chairs and a tall blue lacquer Japanese cabinet.

Climbing into the van, he opened the doors of this Cabinet.

Dr. Fu Manchu stepped out.

"Companion Crossland," he said, "you have earned merit——"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this eBook and is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Trail of Fu Manchu* by Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward (as Sax Rohmer)]