



**RE-ENTER
FU MANCHU**

Sax Rohmer

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FU MANCHU AWAKES. . .

Cheating his past-due death by a sinister miracle of science, the immortal mastermind of world-wide crime plans his most daring stroke—theft of the ultimate weapon which will deliver all mankind into his grasp!

And Nayland Smith, his long-time adversary and pursuer, is playing an inexplicable role—for every move Smith makes seems to serve Fu Manchu's fell purpose!

In the shadow-haunted alleys of Cairo and the neon jungle of New York, Smith's desperate daring and Fu Manchu's malignant genius strive in a fateful duel, with human destiny in the balance.

THE ADVENTURES OF
NAYLAND SMITH

THE INSIDIOUS DR. FU MANCHU
THE RETURN OF DR. FU MANCHU
THE HAND OF FU MANCHU
THE DAUGHTER OF FU MANCHU
THE MASK OF FU MANCHU
THE BRIDE OF FU MANCHU
THE TRAIL OF FU MANCHU
PRESIDENT FU MANCHU
THE DRUMS OF FU MANCHU
THE ISLAND OF FU MANCHU
THE SHADOW OF FU MANCHU
RE-ENTER FU MANCHU
EMPEROR FU MANCHU

RE-ENTER FU MANCHU

SAX ROHMER

PYRAMID BOOKS

NEW YORK

RE-ENTER FU MANCHU

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CHAPTER ONE

“HERE is the *Times* advertisement: ‘Wanted, young man, American, unattached. University graduate preferred, athletic, good appearance. Work highly confidential. Business experience unnecessary. Must be prepared to travel. Apply Box—’ et cetera. And here, Mr. Merrick”—Peter Wellingham looked down at a typed letter—“is your reply.”

Brian nodded. “I imagine you had quite a big mail.”

“You may be surprised to learn”—Wellingham lay back in his chair and pressed his fingertips together—“that applicants were quite few.”

“I’m certainly surprised.”

“I refer, particularly, to suitable applicants. You, I may say, were quite easily the most promising. I need not tell you that I am acting for a third party. Now let’s see. . . . You are a United States citizen, the son of Senator Merrick. You hold an American degree and have recently also graduated from Oxford. Your record in sports is good. Your degrees, if not outstanding, are respectable.”

Brian picked up a brief case from the carpet. “I have the credentials here.”

Peter Wellingham waved a pale hand. He smiled a pale smile.

“I assure you, Mr. Merrick, applicants’ qualifications have already been checked. My principal is highly efficient. Now—you are unattached?”

“Meaning unmarried?”

“Meaning unmarried and not engaged to marry.”

“All clear.” Brian grinned.

“And you are prepared to travel?”

“I’m eager. My father has given me six months’ leave of absence before I go into the family business—”

“Which, I am told, is a very good business.”

Brian experienced a return of that sense of resentment with which Peter Wellingham had filled him earlier. These FBI methods offended him. If the job were offered to him, he was not at all sure he would accept it. He became more than ever certain that he had been subjected to close scrutiny while he had waited. But, to be fair, what did this mean? Only that these

people were looking for a man of exceptional qualities for what must be a highly important job. And the prospect of exciting travel was attractive.

“It’s a good business, all right,” he admitted.

A rap on the door, and the willowy secretary he had seen before came in.

“Sir John is here, Mr. Wellingham. He’s on his way to the House and is pressed for time.”

Peter Wellingham stood up, smiled apologetically.

“I won’t detain you many minutes, Mr. Merrick. My legal adviser is also a member of Parliament. Please excuse me.” He crossed to the door and switched on indirect lighting, so that the crowded bookcases became illuminated. “You might like to look over my library.” He went out and closed the door.

Peter Wellingham was a slender man of uncertain age; pale, with scant fair hair. He was faultlessly groomed and wore correct morning dress. His white hands were slender, and of effeminate beauty. His voice and speech were those of the cultured Englishman, and he wore the sort of short, close-trimmed mustache that Brian associated with the British army. But somehow he couldn’t imagine Peter Wellingham as a soldier, and, try as he would, he couldn’t like him.

He looked around the small but crowded room, trying to reconsider his first impression of the Honorable Peter Wellingham. The secretary who had received him was an attractive Eurasian, and many of the volumes on the shelves dealt with the Orient. There were antiques, too, placed here and there between the books, all of Eastern origin.

How strangely quiet this room seemed! Hard to believe that he was in the heart of fashionable Mayfair and less than fifty yards from Park Lane. Although his physical senses didn’t support the idea, that uncanny suspicion overcame him again—a suspicion that he wasn’t alone, that someone watched him. It had come to him when he first arrived, while he was waiting for the Honorable Peter.

There was only one point in the room from which an observer might be watching. This was a massive Burmese cabinet of dark wood with a number of fretwork cupboards. It seemed to be built into the wall, and there might be a space behind it.

But it was all too fantastic. He crossed to a bookcase and began to read some of the titles. Many dealt with the tangle in the Near East, and not all were in English.

There was one shelf with no books on it, only a bronze sphinx and several framed photographs.

Brian stood still, staring at one of them. It was of Senator McInnes, an old friend of his father's. At another he stared even longer: a lean-faced man with steady, keen eyes, his hair silvering at the temples.

He was still studying this, holding the frame in his hands, when the door opened and Peter Wellingham came back.

"Do you know Sir Denis?" Wellingham asked in evident surprise.

"Not intimately. But Sir Denis Nayland Smith was my father's house guest in Washington two years back."

"Splendid! Sir Denis makes this his base when he's in London. If we come to terms, he will be your chief."

"I understood Sir Denis had retired."

"So he did. But his special knowledge of Eastern problems is unique. He volunteered to act in the present case—I believe at the request of Washington. This is a private appointment. You will be under the orders of no one but Sir Denis. It was Sir Denis' intention," Wellingham explained, "that this should be a six-month agreement, renewable by mutual consent. This, I think, would suit your plans?"

"Perfectly."

"Here is a form of agreement. Will you read it carefully, and if you find it acceptable, sign all three copies." He rang for his secretary.

Brian found himself walking on air. The terms of employment were generous, and he would receive two months' salary in advance. He must be ready to leave for Cairo at short notice, and the cost of equipment he would require would be defrayed by his employers.

He signed the three copies without hesitation and passed them across the desk. Peter Wellingham signed in turn, and his secretary signed as witness.

"Draw Mr. Brian Merrick's check," Wellingham directed.

The girl went out, and Brian's glance followed the graceful figure. As she opened the door, an oblique ray of sunshine touched the intricate carving of the Burmese cabinet, and Brian's glance was diverted, then held. . . .

He suppressed a start. Through the delicately carved panel before one of the small cupboards he thought he saw two brilliant green eyes fixed upon him! He inhaled deeply, looked away. Peter Wellingham was scribbling notes on a pad.

With the closing of the door the apparition had vanished, and Brian tried to tell himself that he was the victim of an illusion. Some shiny object, such as a jade vase, probably stood in the cupboard. His slumbering distrust of Wellingham must not be allowed to upset his judgment. He knew Nayland

Smith to be high up in the British Secret Service and a former assistant commissioner of Scotland Yard. Brian had longed to travel before settling down to serious work, but funds were short. Here was a golden opportunity.

Peter Wellingham looked up.

“I needn’t warn you to observe great discretion concerning the nature of your employment. Mr. Merrick. Sir Denis is engaged upon a dangerous assignment and has entrusted me with the job of finding an additional assistant having certain qualifications. I think you are the man he’s looking for.”

The lissom secretary glided in again, laid a check on the desk, and glided out. Brian avoided glancing at the cabinet while Peter Wellingham signed the check.

Five minutes later Brian was striding along Park Lane. Wellingham, at parting, had walked to the doorstep, wished him good luck, and shaken hands.

The slender white fingers were very cold.

As Peter Wellingham returned to the study and before Brian had reached Park Lane, a section of the Burmese cabinet swung open, showing another room beyond.

A tall, gaunt man stepped out, a man with a phenomenally high brow, crowned with a black cap not unlike a biretta; a man whose strange emerald-green eyes seemed to gaze, not *at* Wellingham, but through his skull into his brain. He was unmistakably Chinese, unmistakably an aristocrat and standing there, wearing a plain yellow robe, he radiated force.

He crossed and seated himself behind the desk. Peter Wellingham remained standing.

“For a moment, Mr. Wellingham, I feared”—he spoke pedantically exact English, except that he stressed the sibilants—“that your peculiar personality had produced an unfortunate impression. This I should have regretted. I had Brian Merrick under close observation, and I am satisfied that he will admirably serve my purpose. But he inherits a streak of his father’s obstinacy, and at one time he considered declining the offer. That was why I called you from the room—your cue to draw his attention to the photographs.”

Peter Wellingham’s white forehead was damp. He had detected a note of menace in that strange voice.

“I should have been sorry, Doctor—”

“But too late. With your succession to the title I cannot interfere. But the facts concerning your political views, if suspected by Lord Chevradale, would have disastrous results for you.”

“I did my best, Doctor. I feel sure that he—”

“Be sure of no man. For the only man of whom you may be sure is yourself.”

“Shall I take steps to have Merrick covered during the time he remains in London?”

The brilliant eyes were raised in a penetrating glance.

“Such steps have already been taken. I fly to Cairo tonight. Your instructions concerning Brian Merrick will reach you through the usual channels.”

Brian hurried along Park Lane to his hotel. Lola was lunching with him, and he knew she would be pressed for time, as usual. Lola Erskine was a designer for Michel, a famous Paris house that every season dictated to smart women the world over exactly what they must wear. Equally at home on Paris boulevard, Fifth Avenue, or Bond Street, she was a stimulating companion.

He walked into the crowded lounge, looking eagerly around, and there was Lola, waving to him. He joined her, signaling to a waiter.

“Hello, Brian!” She greeted him with that half-amused and half-affectionate smile that he found so fascinating—although sometimes he vaguely suspected her of secretly laughing at him. “Don’t order anything for me yet. Look, I have one already.”

“Have I kept you waiting?”

“Only five minutes. But I was dying for a drink. I had a desperately tough morning.”

“You don’t look like it. You look like a cover girl. Is that dress by Michel?”

“Why ask me? If I wore anything else I’d be fired on sight. Also, I get them at cost.”

“Lola!” He grasped her arm as a waiter came along. “Don’t finish that Martini or whatever it is. Share a bottle of champagne with me. It’s a celebration. I’ve picked up a wonderful job!”

Lola stared. She had dark gray-blue eyes that never seemed to join in her smiles; abstract, mysterious eyes.

“Not that thing I showed you in the *Times*?”

He nodded. “Waiter, may I have a wine list?”

As the man went away Lola asked, “Is it anything really good? I mean, worth a bottle of champagne?”

“It’s worth a case! Listen—I know you’ll have to rush right after lunch. There’s so much I want to say to you. Are you free for dinner tonight?”

“I can be, Brian—if you’re not being extravagant.”

“I have to leave London at short notice. And I hate that part of it now I’ve met you.”

“That’s sweet of you. It all depends where you’re going. Michel has branches around the world and my job takes me to all of them.”

“I’m going to Cairo.”

“Cairo? No, we haven’t opened in Cairo so far. What kind of job is this, Brian? Commercial or political?”

The waiter brought the wine list, which Brian handed to Lola.

“I won’t let you be extravagant,” she told him, “and if I’m to eat my lunch it will have to be only a half bottle. Say, a half of Piper Heidsieck, ‘forty-nine.”

As the waiter went away, Brian looked at Lola with frank admiration. She was unlike any woman he had ever known. Yet he felt that he had been looking for her all his life. He longed to know if his interest was returned, but those somber eyes told him nothing.

“Don’t turn around,” Lola whispered, “but there’s a queer-looking man sitting just behind you who seems to be interested in our conversation. This job of yours sounds rather hush-hush. Let’s talk about me until we go in to lunch. Then you can tell me all about it.”

Brian had reserved a corner table in the grill room, and when they were seated he asked, “Any sign of the spy?”

Lola smiled and shook her head. “I may have misjudged him. But he really did seem to be listening. He hasn’t come in, anyway.”

“I’m glad. There certainly seems to be something unusual about my new job. But as you put me onto it, Lola, you’re entitled to know all about it. You’d gone out when I got my mail this morning, and there was a very formal note that said something like *The Honorable Peter Wellingham would be obliged if Mr. Brian Merrick would call at the above address at eleven A.M. in connection with his application dated the fifteenth instant.*’ You know all about the kind of people who are ‘Honorable,’ Lola. Who is Peter Wellingham?”

Lola looked confused, almost alarmed, but quickly recovered her composure.

“He’s Lord Chevradale’s son.”

“Do you know him?” There was a note of suspicion in Brian’s voice.

“Not personally. But I’ve heard that he’s badly in debt.”

“That’s queer. Because he gave me a substantial advance on my salary. I hope it’s not a rubber check! But let me tell you.”

And so over lunch he told her all that had happened on this eventful morning. He admitted that he had not taken to Peter Wellingham, but that because of the strong attractions of the job he had overcome his prejudice, convinced that to work under Sir Denis Nayland Smith would be an education in itself.

Sitting there, facing a pretty girl and surrounded by normal, healthy people, many of them fellow Americans, with deft waiters moving from table to table, he dismissed the illusion of the green eyes behind the Burmese cabinet. He decided not to mention it.

“I really owe this chance to travel to you, Lola. You saw the advertisement in the *Times*, and if you hadn’t encouraged me to do it, I don’t believe I should have written.”

“It read like a job created purposely for you, Brian.” She smiled rather wistfully. “I knew how you wanted to see more of the world before going home, and I’m really glad you pulled it off.”

“There’s one fly in the ointment,” Brian confessed. “Just as I get to know you I have to dash off to Egypt.”

“But you told me the Near East fascinated you, that you’d always wanted to go there.”

“That’s true. And it would be perfect—if you were coming with me.”

Lola took a cigarette from her case. “I never know where I’ll be sent next. I admit that Egypt’s unlikely but I don’t suppose you’ll be there long. We’re both world wanderers now, and we’re certain to get together again somewhere. I must rush, Brian. Six-thirty at the Mirabelle. . . .”

CHAPTER TWO

IN an old Cairo house not far from the Mosque of El Ashraf, a house still untouched by Western “improvements,” a tall, gaunt figure paced slowly up and down a room that once had been the saloon of the harem. High, and lighted by a lantern in the painted roof, it was brightly paved in the Arab manner, and had elaborate paneled walls and two *mushrabîyeh* windows.

The man pacing the tiled floor wore the same yellow robe that he had worn during his brief interview with Peter Wellingham in London and a similar black cap on his massive skull. His finely lined features were those of a scholar who had never spared himself in the quest of knowledge. It was a wonderful face. It might have belonged to a saint, or to the Fallen Angel.

His walk was feline, silent. He seemed to be listening for some expected sound. And suddenly it came . . . a strange, muffled, animal sound.

He crossed in three strides to a screen set before one of the recessed windows, and drew it aside.

Two glass boxes stood on a narrow table. In one was a rat, in the other a rabbit. It was the rabbit that had made the queer sound. The little creature thrashed around there in convulsions, and even as the screen was moved aside became still. The rat already lay rigid.

The man in the yellow robe walked in his catlike way through an arched opening into an adjoining room equipped as a laboratory. Some of the apparatus in this singular room would have puzzled any living scientist. From a wall safe that he unlocked he took out a small phial. He seated himself at a glass-topped table, removed the stopper from the phial, and inserted a dipper. The delicacy of touch in those long-nailed fingers was amazing.

Smearing a spot from the dipper onto a slide, he set the slide in place in a large microscope and, stopping, stared through the lens, which he slightly adjusted.

Presently he stood up and, using a lancet, took a spot of his own blood and dropped it onto the smeared plate, which he immediately replaced. He again bent over the microscope. When he stood up a second time his expression was the expression of a demon.

He composed himself and pressed a button on a panel. A door opened and a young Japanese came in. He wore a white tunic.

“Bring Josef Gorodin here, Matsukata. Then wait in the saloon with two of my Burmese until you hear the gong.”

Matsukata bowed and went out. He returned shortly with a thickset man, also in white, whose heavy Slavonic features were set in what might have been a permanent scowl. He tried to meet the gaze of the emerald-green eyes, but had to look aside. He spoke.

“You wished to see me, Comrade Fu Manchu?”

Dr. Fu Manchu continued to watch him. “You may address me either as Excellency or as Doctor. Comrade—no! I have offered my services—at my own price—to your masters. This does not mean that I kneel at the shrine of Karl Marx. I have something to say. Sit down.”

It was not an invitation; it was a command. Josef Gorodin sat down.

“On the evening I returned here from London,” Fu Manchu went on, “you were at work here, upon some experiments that I wished you to carry out in my absence. They had no practical importance. They were designed to test your ability. Your results convinced me that you were not untalented.”

“Thank you,” Gorodin muttered sarcastically.

“I showed you this phial.” Fu Manchu held it up. “I told you that many years ago I had completed my long experiments—those experiments so vainly attempted by the old alchemists—and that I had discovered what they termed the Elixir of Life. I said ‘The small quantity of the elixir in this phial contains three additional decades of life for any person who knows how to use it!’ You remember?”

“I remember.”

“I told you that by certain familiar symptoms I had been warned that the time had come for me to renew the treatment; that otherwise death might claim me at any hour. You remember?”

Gorodin bowed his head.

“You returned later, Josef Gorodin, and begged me to give you a drop of the preparation for analysis. I consented, for I knew it would defy your analysis. I told you to return the phial to the safe. You remember?”

Gorodin moistened his heavy lips, glanced up, then down again. “I remember.”

Dr. Fu Manchu reached along the table and struck a small silver gong that stood there. Matsukata appeared in the archway, followed by two stocky Asiatics. Gorodin sprang up, fists clenched, but was instantly seized by the

experienced manhandlers of the Chinese doctor's bodyguard. And when Fu Manchu, watching without expression, spoke again, his voice came as a sibilant whisper.

"I am sure your analysis had no results, Josef Gorodin. But I am about to give you conclusive evidence of the nature of this elixir. Seat him there, Matsukata. Slit his sleeve up to the shoulder."

Gorodin had turned purple. He was a powerful man, but had quickly given up struggling, as every movement resulted in violent pain.

"You misjudge your position, and mine!" he shouted. "I am senior aide to the Minister of Scientific Research!"

Dr. Fu Manchu was charging a hypodermic syringe from the phial. "This one injection will arrest both mental and physical decline, and give you ten more years at your present robust age to pursue your researches for the Ministry."

"If you dare to harm me you will sign your own death sentence!"

"Hold his arm still, Matsukata." Fu Manchu spoke softly, holding the syringe in a steady hand. "Were you attached to my staff merely to watch me, or to destroy me? Answer."

Gorodin avoided those green eyes, but he began to tremble. He clenched his teeth.

"You daren't do it!" he muttered.

"You mean, Dr. Gorodin, that you fear to have your useful life extended for ten years beyond its normal span?" The needle point touched Gorodin's skin.

"Stop!" It was a scream. "What do you want to know?"

The needle point was removed an inch or so. "You heard my question. Answer it."

Gorodin swallowed noisily. "There are those who believe that to give you control of all our resources was a dangerous price to pay for your services—that the power once held by Stalin would be seized by you."

"My poor Gorodin! The power *I* shall possess will exceed his wildest dreams." The gaunt face became transfigured. Fu Manchu's brilliant eyes blazed with the light of fanaticism. "But no matter. And you, no doubt, are one of those who believe this?"

"Yes."

"And so you attempted to—what do you term it?—liquidate me? Where is the phial of elixir?"

"There beside you."

“I shall repeat my question—*once*. Where is the phial of elixir?”

“There beside you.”

“Then you must welcome these ten additional years of life.”

And Dr. Fu Manchu injected the contents of the syringe into Gorodin’s arm.

A scream more animal than human came from the man’s lips. He fought like a captive tiger, ignoring the agony that every movement produced. But his bare arm he could not move. Matsukata held it in a grip of steel. Gorodin’s veins bulged like blue cords on his forehead. Then he relaxed, panting.

“You have murdered me.” He spoke breathlessly. “You will pay with your own life for this.”

“You have courage.” Dr. Fu Manchu studied the inflamed face with scientific curiosity. “From the shape of your head I had not expected it. Until I have leisure to examine the contents of this phial that you ingeniously substituted for my own, I cannot say if there is any antidote to the poison. Could you enlighten me?”

Gorodin’s lips were turning blue. “There is none.”

“Then you will have the honor to die as you planned *I* should die. Recently I watched a rat in its last agonies from this treatment. I have no desire to watch another rat die in the same way.” He dropped the syringe in a glass bowl and glanced at Matsukata. “Sterilize. Incinerate his body.”

Dr. Fu Manchu turned and walked slowly out of the laboratory.

For Brian Merrick the days that followed in London seemed more like a dream than a reality when he looked back on them later. Mr. Wellingham made all the necessary passport and medical arrangements, fixing appointments at times to suit Brian’s convenience. The organization for which he acted was undeniably efficient. Lola took charge of his shopping list, and whenever possible went with him to a famous store at which an account had been opened in his name. She sternly checked some of his wilder impulses, such as the purchase of a sun helmet.

“You’d look like a fool in Cairo wearing such a thing! If they send you up to the Sudan there are plenty of stores in Cairo where you can buy all you want.”

They lunched, dined, and danced together. The sun shone and Brian was ridiculously happy. One afternoon, sitting in Hyde Park with Lola, he said,

“Today, I felt as though we were shopping for a honeymoon abroad. Oh, Lola, if only it had been true!”

He saw her blush, lower her lashes, and glance away. “We come from a country of hasty marriages,” she told him softly, her usual composure restored. “Such a marriage is usually just the first of several. We enjoy being together. Why get serious about it?”

“Lola, I hate leaving you.”

“I know I shall miss you, too, Brian. But we both have jobs to do and our jobs are interesting.”

Brian watched the piquant face. “But you won’t drop out of sight? You’ll write to me?”

“Of course I shall—if I know where to find you.”

“As soon as I reach Cairo I’ll radio my address to you at Michel’s.”

“No, Brian dear! Don’t do that. Michel won’t allow any private correspondence to come to the office. And I might be anywhere. I’ll tell you what, Brian. When I get my sailing orders I’ll leave a forwarding address at the hotel if I haven’t heard from you by then.”

“It might take weeks to reach you!”

“I’ll tip the hall porter to send it airmail.”

That night they were out together later than usual, Lola lovely to look upon in her cunningly simple dance dress, Brian drunk with longing but kept in check by those sudden moods of aloofness that sometimes came over Lola, like a mysterious cloak, changing her entire personality. At one moment all sweet surrender, in the next she became the unattainable woman.

But in the taxi going back to the hotel he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. “Lola,” he murmured, “I love you . . .”

She returned his kiss, but gently pushed him away.

“Don’t make love to me now, Brian, when I know we’re parting so soon. I’m very fond of you. But please wait. I feel we shan’t be parted for long.”

He detained her in the dark lounge of the hotel for an unreasonable time; and when, very tired, she stepped off the elevator (Lola lived on the floor below Brian), he felt that he had lost her forever. A sense of desolation swept over him.

It was at approximately the same hour that an event occurred in the old Arab mansion near the Mosque of El Ashraf that would have a great influence upon Brian Merrick’s life.

The lofty saloon was dimly lighted by hanging lamps of perforated brass. Dr. Fu Manchu lay on a cushioned seat in one of the *mushrabiyeh* windows, so that what little breeze there was could reach him from the courtyard outside. His normally gaunt features were so gray and sunken that now that they resembled a death's-head. His eyes were dim. It seemed to Matsukata, the Japanese physician, who sat watching him, that only the man's unquenchable spirit remained alive. When he spoke, the once imperious voice was a mere croak.

"You have never . . . seen me . . . in this pitiable condition . . . before. I knew I had . . . little time. But the . . . dreadful change has . . . come so suddenly." Fu Manchu panted for some moments. "Gorodin's treachery . . . has destroyed me . . . You have searched . . . every inch . . . of his rooms . . . for the stolen phial?"

Matsukata bowed his head. "Every fraction of an inch, Excellency. But the Sherif Mohammed has been at work nearly twenty-fours without sleep or rest on the material."

Dr. Fu Manchu's eyes closed. "If I die . . . tonight," he whispered, "mankind will . . . not long . . . survive me."

He became silent. Matsukata bent over him in sudden anxiety. A door opened at the other end of the saloon and a man entered quietly, an old, white-bearded man who wore Arab dress.

A change crept over Fu Manchu's gray face. Without opening his eyes he whispered in Arabic, "You have it, Hakim?"

"I have it, Excellency, at last."

From under his black robe the old physician took a small phial, half filled with nearly colorless fluid.

"You are . . . sure . . . of the antacid?" The words were barely audible.

"Positive."

"Proceed . . . quickly."

"His heart"—Matsukata spoke close to the Arab doctor's ear—"is dangerously weakened."

"I understand. We have no choice. The convulsions that follow the administration of the elixir are frightful. Be prepared for this. But any attempt to check them would be instantly fatal."

Brian had a restless night, not falling asleep until dawn was peering in at his window. He was awakened by the buzzing of his bedside phone. As he

took up the receiver, he noted vaguely that it was ten o'clock.

"Mr. Merrick?" a woman's voice inquired.

A hope that the caller was Lola died. "Yes, this is Brian Merrick."

"Hold the line for Mr. Wellingham."

Peter Wellingham came on. Even without seeing the pale face, Brian was chilled by those tones of false geniality.

"Good morning, Merrick. Hope I haven't waked you up. Your instructions are just to hand, in the form of a reservation for a BOAC flight to Cairo leaving at the uncomfortable hour of five-thirty tomorrow morning. You'll be picked up at your hotel at four, so I thought I'd give you time to pack."

"Very thoughtful," Brian murmured.

"A member of Sir Denis' staff, a Mr. Ahmad, will contact you when you arrive in Cairo. You'll like him. I'll send all papers along right away. Everything else in order?"

"Everything."

"I'm off to Paris in an hour, or I should have loved to have you lunch with me. But I expect you'll be well occupied with your own affairs. I saw you in Pall Mall one afternoon with an uncommonly pretty girl. You Americans seem to be damned popular!"

When Wellingham hung up, Brian lay back on his ruffled pillow and tried to figure out just where he stood and how he felt about it.

He had sent a long airmail letter to his father, telling him that a chance to travel had come his way in the form of a job as assistant to Sir Denis Nayland Smith. The Senator had replied, offering good advice and assuring Brian of his support if ever it should be needed. Then had followed some disturbing facts about the situation in the Near East.

"The public," his father wrote, "doesn't appreciate the seriousness of the situation out there. Here at home they think it doesn't concern them, as the trouble is so far away. But I can assure you that the President is deeply disturbed. The U.S. is the only partner in the Western bloc with any cash in the bank. This piles a terrible responsibility on us. I'm sure you know how to take care of yourself, my boy, but be very careful when you get to Egypt. You couldn't have a better man beside you than Nayland Smith."

But now that the moment of departure was near, it all seemed unreal. A dream had been realized. He had knocked, and the gate of adventure had opened.

And it meant that he had only one more day with Lola!

He snatched up the phone and asked to be connected with her room. There was no reply. But she had probably slept late, as he had done, and was now in her bath. He hung up, waited impatiently for ten minutes, and then called again.

No reply.

He jumped out of bed, called room service, ordered coffee, and went into the bathroom. The waiter came while Brian was in there. He rapped on the door.

“Your coffee, sir—and a note for you.”

Brian came out wrapped in a towel before the man had left the room. On the tray he saw a hotel envelope addressed to him in Lola’s handwriting.

He tore it open impatiently and read:

Brian dear:

I found instructions when I got in last night to take a 9:35 A.M. train to Nottingham, where there’s a sale of old lace. Which means I can’t get back until tomorrow! But I called the office this morning and asked for tomorrow off. I had to leave at 8:30 and didn’t like to wake you. But we can spend the whole day together tomorrow.

Love, Brian dear.

LOLA

Native Cairo slept. No sound came from the narrow street upon which the gate of a tree-shadowed courtyard opened. Inside the house there was unbroken silence. And Matsukata and the old Arab physician never stirred.

They had witnessed the appalling convulsions brought about by the injection of the secret elixir. In intervals of exhaustion, the Japanese surgeon had anxiously tested Dr. Fu Manchu’s heart, and had shaken his head. Even his wonderful composure had almost deserted him.

“It is always so,” the old Arab had murmured. “Only his heart is ten years older than the last time.”

For four hours they had been watching there, tirelessly. The convulsive struggles had subsided long before. Dr. Fu Manchu lay still as a dead man, so that his resemblance to the mummy of the long dead Pharaoh Seti I was uncannily increased.

The great change came slowly. First the gray tinge faded from the face of the apparently dead man. Then the hollow cheeks seemed to fill out. Faintly, and soon more clearly, Fu Manchu’s breath became audible. The

two doctors exchanged glances. The old Arab drew a handkerchief from the sleeve of his robe and dried his forehead.

And at last Dr. Fu Manchu awoke—a dead man snatched from the tomb by his own superhuman knowledge.

He opened his eyes. They were clouded no longer. They were brilliantly green. He looked from face to face.

“Mankind is spared.” His voice had all its old authority. “My star rises in the East.”

Brian spent a most unhappy morning. He decided that he needed company, and called up everybody he could think of to join him for lunch. But everybody either was away or had a prior engagement.

His packing was done in half an hour, for he traveled light, and he lunched alone in the hotel grill room, wondering if he would ever lunch there again with Lola. Now that separation had come, swift as a sword stroke, he realized acutely how much she meant to him. He thought of the wildest plans, such as chartering a plane to Nottingham, but common sense rejected them. He wouldn't see her again before he left for Cairo.

After a miserable lunch he walked across to Hyde Park, a hotel writing pad in his pocket, and took a chair at a spot where he could see the boats on the Serpentine. Lola and he had often sat there. He settled down to write her a long letter. It proved to be even a longer letter than he had intended it to be, and he decided to read it through and see if he had repeated himself.

It was at this point that he became aware of a voice. This voice was in some way familiar. The speaker seemed to be seated somewhere behind him, but too far away for Brian to make out what he was saying. Yet he seemed to recognize the voice, its curious intonations.

He tried to blot out other sounds—oars in rowlocks, shouts of young oarsmen, splashing—and to pick out words. And, up to a point, he succeeded.

“. . . no choice . . . instructions are . . . break off . . . association . . . Sorry . . . all that . . .”

Brian's curiosity had to be satisfied. Taking out a cigarette, he sparked his lighter and turned aside as if to guard the flame from a trifling breeze, but really so that he could glance over his shoulder.

His curiosity was satisfied.

The Honorable Peter Wellingham sat in the shade of a fine old oak tree talking animatedly to a girl whose face was shadowed by a large wide-

brimmed hat, but who almost certainly was Lola.

Brian turned his head quickly. He had a sudden sensation almost of nausea. Desperately he told himself that he couldn't be sure the girl was Lola.

Although Wellingham had called him on several occasions, this was the first time he had seen him since that morning when the agreement had been signed. And Wellingham had told him only a few hours ago that he was leaving for Paris almost immediately!

Brian put his pen back in his pocket and stared at the long, unfinished letter. First he must regain control of himself, then make sure that he hadn't been mistaken about the identity of the girl with Wellingham. He must be cautious. If he had been lured into some kind of trap, if Wellingham and Lola (his heart seemed to miss a beat or two) were in league, what was their purpose?

He became calmer; he listened again. He could no longer hear Wellingham's voice. He turned cautiously and looked back. They were walking away.

Brian jumped up and followed. Already they had a long start, and they were headed for the highway parallel to Rotten Row, where cars could be parked. He began to run.

The graceful carriage of the girl, her figure, even the dress she wore told him that she was Lola. The big floppy hat he had never seen. But it might be worn to shade her face if they chanced to see him.

He was still ten yards behind when Wellingham opened the door of a smart convertible for the girl, walked around, and got into the driving seat. The car glided off.

Brian called Peter Wellingham's number, but was told by the Eurasian secretary that Mr. Wellingham was not at home. He gave his name and asked where Mr. Wellingham had gone. She was so sorry, but she didn't know. Was there any message?

His next impulse was to call Michel's. But Lola had been so insistent on this point all along that he hesitated. After all, even now he wasn't *sure* that the girl with Wellingham had been Lola. And Lola had told him that "Madame" simply wouldn't tolerate personal calls to members of her staff.

All his old distrust of Wellingham had swept over him again like an avalanche. Of Lola he hardly dared to think, except that he flogged his memory of the girl in the Park in search of something about her to prove that she was *not* Lola.

In any case, he was committed to go to Egypt. He couldn't allow his personal doubts and frustrations to make him break faith with Sir Denis.

An Oxford friend invited Brian to dine with him, which revived his drooping spirits. He managed that evening to forget his problems for an hour or two, had a few drinks, and felt better. He returned fairly early, remembering his four o'clock appointment, and tried to hypnotize himself to sleep by conjuring up mental pictures of Cairo. But somehow Lola got into the pictures.

CHAPTER THREE

CAIRO, from the air, while not so breath-taking as Damascus seen from above, proved exciting enough all the same to Brian. His urge to visit the Near East had been gratified. But every human blessing has a string to it. The string in this case was one he had knotted himself—Lola.

He had left a letter at the reception desk for her, but not the letter he had been writing in the park. The second one had been even harder to write than the first; for although he had no positive proof that it was she he had seen with Wellingham, he remained obstinately convinced that it had been no one else.

The terms of the *Times* advertisement, the fact that Lola had drawn his attention to it, her words—“It read like a job created purposely for you”—added up to a dark, a horrible suspicion. *Had* it been created purposely for him? Was it a new variety of the old confidence trick? Until he actually met Nayland Smith he couldn't be sure that it wasn't.

But its purpose? The money in his wallet was real enough. His fare had been paid to Cairo. Why? Could it be a case of abduction—a plot to bring about his disappearance? His father was a wealthy man. . . . But this idea was too preposterous. He had to laugh it off.

In fact, he was really trying all the time to convince himself that there was nothing wrong in the business. If Lola was really Peter Wellingham's girl friend and had merely been fooling with him—well, she wasn't the only pretty girl who enjoyed the attentions of more than one man.

He would get over it. Anyway, he must wait and see. . . .

Accommodations had been reserved for him, and an Egyptian wearing hotel uniform was standing by when the plane taxied to a stop on the runway. This experienced courier brushed him through customs as if by magic, and in no time Brian found himself speeding along a lebbekh-lined avenue into the ancient city. The colorful crowds, the palm trees, the unfamiliar buildings, and the queer smell that belongs to Cairo, all came up to his expectations.

His apartment had a balcony overlooking a busy street and the Esbekîyeh Gardens. The ruins of Shepherd's Hotel, nearby, which the driver pointed out, struck a warning note, recalling his father's advice, but it

wasn't sufficient to depress him. While he was having a shower, a boy brought him a message. It was neatly typed on paper headed with an address in Sharîa Abdin and a phone number. It said:

Dear Mr. Merrick:

I shall give myself the pleasure of calling upon you in the morning. Probably you are tired after your long journey, but if you want to do any sightseeing, please don't go out without a reliable dragoman. Sir Denis is expected to arrive at any moment.

Yours obediently,

A. J. AHMAD

This suited Brian well enough. He was certainly tired, and beyond a stroll in the surrounding streets he had no wish to go sightseeing. He planned to go to bed soon after dinner, and he did.

He was at breakfast when Mr. Ahmad arrived.

Mr. Ahmad, correctly dressed in European clothes, proved to be a good-looking Egyptian with a marked resemblance to Egypt's prime minister. He spoke perfect English, but his phrasing was French.

"The cause of Sir Denis' delay," he told Brian, "is unknown. But his movements are always unpredictable. We expect him hourly. He appears like the *jinn*. There is a draft of air, a door opens, and Sir Denis Nayland Smith is with us!"

"That's good fun for the staff!" Brian grinned. "I suppose the moment he appears I'm expected to report?"

Mr. Ahmad shrugged slightly. "As soon as possible."

"Of course. I mean he wouldn't want me to hang around the hotel?"

"Most certainly not. You know him. Judge for yourself. Provided you don't leave Cairo, so that I can find you at short notice—it is sufficient. But a word of warning. If you are disposed to wander in the older parts of the city—"

"Take a dragoman? Now listen, Mr. Ahmad. Is that an order from Sir Denis?"

"But certainly not! It is merely a suggestion."

"Meaning I can do as I like? You see, I don't favor the idea of being taken in tow by a guide. I like to find my own way, go where I please, and stay as long as I want to."

Mr. Ahmad smiled a dazzling smile. "The true sentiments of your freedom-loving country! Please yourself."

“But take care. European and American travelers are not too popular in certain districts. If any trouble should start, take cover.”

“Thank you.”

When, a short time later, Brian set out, brushing off the beggars, the guides, and the vendors of scarabs and amulets, and trying to brush off the flies, he looked up to a fleckless sky and found, paradoxically, that he was no longer unhappy.

He wondered if the atmosphere of Cairo had some magical soothing quality; for he seemed, now, to be prepared for whatever lay in store for him. He had suddenly become a fatalist. If he had been made the victim of some mysterious plot, it didn't matter. The plotters had gained nothing so far, and he was living in luxury. If Lola didn't answer his letter, never mind. He had had a good time with her in London. He wondered if the mood would last, or if later there would be a sharp reaction.

Sauntering across the Esbekîyeh, he was deeply interested in all he saw, and he went on into a street bisected by a maze of narrower streets, all teeming with noisy humanity. He was in the Mûski, artery of many bazaars. Beggars and stallkeepers buzzed around him like flies around a honey pot. He smilingly ignored them, which the head hall porter had told him was the best method. From passers-by who wore European dress, and therefore might speak English, he inquired the way to the Khân Khalîl, where, the same authority had informed him, swords, daggers, silk robes, amber mouthpieces, and other colorful products were on view.

And presently he found it. The hall porter had advised him, if he wished to make any purchases, to consult a certain Achmed es-Salah, whose shop anyone would point out. (“He sells very good cigarettes.”) It proved to resemble nothing so much as an artificial cave. The venerable Achmed sat in the entrance smoking, and at sight of the card that Brian had brought along he waved him to a chair and offered coffee and cigarettes.

Brian had a low opinion of the sirupy Arab coffee, but he found the Egyptian cigarettes, with their unfamiliar aroma, a pleasant change from the American variety. He asked if he could buy some.

Achmed reached behind him, opened a drawer, and produced a flat tin box containing a hundred. Smilingly he began to explain that only from him could these cigarettes be obtained. But his customer's attention was wandering. Farther back in the shadows of the shop a female figure was vaguely visible to Brian—a girl who held a veil around the lower part of her face. She appeared to be watching him. He glanced away again.

"I'll take the cigarettes," he told Achmed. "If I want more I'll write and send dollars, as you suggest."

"I supply them to many American gentlemen," Achmed declared, accepting the ten dollars that he claimed to be their price.

Brian concluded that many American gentlemen who visited Cairo must be wealthy American gentlemen. Achmed, indicating those shops that were in sight, told him where amber goods, silk robes, authentic antique pieces might be bought cheaply. Brian thanked him and stood up to go.

Glancing once more into the shadows, he saw that the girl's remarkable eyes—they were amber eyes—seemed to be fixed upon him. . . .

He looked in briefly at some of the shops Achmed had recommended, but bought nothing. Coming out of the last one, which stocked scimitars, Saracen daggers, and other queer Oriental weapons, he found himself staring into a shady alley nearly opposite. He had caught a glimpse of lustrous amber eyes!

The girl from Achmed's had followed him. Why? Was she a prostitute, or had she some other purpose? Perhaps she was a member of Achmed's household, instructed to find out if he did any business upon which Achmed could claim a commission.

He strode off at a pace that gave many of the leisurely Egyptians a jolt and called down on him dreadful curses, which, fortunately, he didn't understand. He recovered his good humor in a street that seemed to lead to a city gate, turned right into another, now hopelessly lost, and saw the minaret of a mosque right ahead. He glanced back quickly. There was no sign of the Arab girl.

But from behind came shouts and a sound of many running feet. The sound drew nearer. Brian wondered if he had started a riot. The word "*Inglizi*" sometimes rose above the roar of voices. *He* might be the person referred to!

He put on a spurt, passed the mosque, and, looking back, saw the head of what was evidently an excited mob pouring around the corner.

Just as he was clear of the mosque, out from its courtyard spurted a party of Egyptian police. He noticed an open doorway almost beside him, darted in, and found it led to nowhere but a rickety staircase. He heard wild shouting and the sounds of fighting outside, then a shot.

Brian started upstairs, as the tumult suggested that the police were being pushed back. On the first dark landing he nearly knocked over a water jar that stood near the head of the stairs. But the house seemed to be inhabited only by a variety of stenches. He mounted higher. The battle now was raging

immediately outside the door below. Went up another flight, and found himself on the flat roof. He saw all sorts of pans, jars, and indescribable litter lying about, but nobody was up there. Brian crouched and looked over the low parapet down into the street.

The rioters had been rounded up by the armed police. They were all young, wild-eyed, typical tinder for a rabble-rouser. They were falling back, three of them carrying a wounded comrade. Brian could see a second group of police extended in line before the mosque. The rioters were trapped.

He sighed with relief. Slightly raising his head, he looked across the street to find out if he had been observed from there. He saw something that staggered him.

A heavy iron gate in a high wall that he remembered having noticed as he ran into the doorway below opened on the tree-shaded courtyard of a fine old Arab house. Mushrabîyeh windows overhung the courtyard on one side, but directly facing Brian were two large barred windows. Evidently there must be another that he couldn't see, for the room was well lighted. And in this room, pacing restlessly about, he saw a tall, lean man who smoked a pipe, and who seemed to be talking angrily to someone else who wasn't visible from Brian's viewpoint.

The shouts below had merged into sullen murmurs as the young rowdies were taken in charge by the police and marched off. Brian scarcely noticed them now. He was watching. And at last he was sure.

The man in the barred room was Nayland Smith.

Dr. Fu Manchu sat on a divan in the saloon of the old house near the Mosque of El Ashraf. On an ivory and mother-of-pearl coffee table a long-stemmed pipe with a tiny jade bowl lay beside the other equipment of an opium smoker. Before him a girl was kneeling on a rug, her long, lustrous amber eyes raised anxiously to the wonderful but evil face. She wore native dress, but no longer concealed her features with a veil.

"It was the disturbance made by the students from El Azhar, Master. I lost sight of him and could not get through."

"I heard the young fools. Shouting phrases coined by aliens who are planning their destruction. Such half-molded brains are fertile soil for the seeds of violence. All the same, you have failed me. The point at which he disappeared is one dangerously near us."

"Master, I—"

“You shall have one more opportunity. Change into European dress. Go to Brian Merrick’s hotel and make his acquaintance. He will be lonely. Attach yourself to him.”

He said no more, but watched her go out, then stood up slowly and walked along the saloon to a door, opened it, and went into another lofty room furnished as a studio.

On a wooden pedestal was a life-sized head of a man modeled in clay. A number of sketches and photographs of the same subject were pinned to the walls. It would appear that the sculptor had worked from these, and not from the living model. It was a fine, virile portrait of a masterful character.

Dr. Fu Manchu appeared to be particularly interested in the shape of the molded nose. He surveyed it from every side, the all-seeing gaze of green eyes absorbed in the finer lines of the nostrils, the straight bridge. He compared the clay model with the photographs, and at last seemed to be satisfied.

He passed on. He went down a short stair and entered a fully equipped surgery filled with a nauseating odor of anaesthetics. A patient lay on an operating table, two surgeons bending over him. They sprang upright as Fu Manchu appeared. He ignored them, stooped, studied the face of the man who lay there, and then turned blazing eyes upon the surgeons, one of whom was Matsukata.

“Who operated?” he demanded.

The taller surgeon turned a white, nervous face to Dr. Fu Manchu.

“I operated, Master.” He spoke in French.

“I thought better of Paris surgery,” Fu Manchu told him, speaking the same language sibilantly. “There will be a scar!”

“I assure you—”

“There will be a scar—and there is no time to rectify the error. The consequences of this may be grave for me—and also for you. . . .”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE moment the narrow street was cleared of police and rioters, Brian crept downstairs unobserved, looked cautiously left and right, and then started out to try to retrace his route. At the courtyard gate of the old house in which he had seen Nayland Smith he hesitated for a moment, then hurried on. He considered it a stroke of luck that the inhabitants of the ramshackle tenement in which he had sheltered were apparently otherwise engaged.

More by luck than by good navigation he presently found himself once more in the street leading to the Khân Khalîl. He looked around for a stray cab, for he was impatient to solve the mystery of Sir Denis' presence in Cairo when Mr. Ahmed said he had not yet arrived, and in a house in the heart of the native quarter. What in the name of sanity did it mean?

He could not very well be wrong about the identity of the man in the room with barred windows. Nayland Smith's personality was unmistakable, although Brian hadn't seen him for two years. He had recognized some of his curious mannerisms: the way he held his briar pipe clenched between his teeth; a trick of pulling at the lobe of his ear as he talked.

Getting back at last, hot, tired, and dusty, he paused in the lobby of the hotel to talk to the all-knowing hall porter. He had consulted him on many matters and tipped him liberally. He described his unpleasant experience with the rioters.

The uniformed Egyptian smiled. "You should take a good dragoman with you, sir. He would see to it that you avoided such things."

"Very likely," Brian agreed. "Maybe I'm too independent. But perhaps you can tell me something. I got lost, and wandered on into another quarter, 'way beyond the Khân Khalîl. It wasn't far from a city gate, and there was a mosque."

"There are many."

"It was near a street where they sold cotton goods and pottery and that sort of thing."

"Ah, that would be the Ghurîyeh."

"Well, in a narrow street leading into what you call the Ghurîyeh there's a fine old mansion with a high wall around it. Most unlikely spot for such a house. There's a courtyard, and—"

“I know what you have seen, sir. It is the house of the Sherif Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf.”

“And who is he?”

“A very holy man, sir. A descendant of the Prophet, and the greatest physician in Cairo. Or he was; he is retired from practice now.”

Brian was more mystified than ever. What possible connection could there be between Sir Denis and the Sherif Mohammed?

He called Mr. Ahmad's number, but failed to get a reply.

What to do next was the problem. But the more he thought about it, the more completely it baffled him.

He went into the cocktail bar fairly early in the evening, and saw that he had it to himself. He had made several further attempts to call Mr. Ahmad, but could get no reply. He ordered Scotch on the rocks and sat there sipping his drink and feeling very puzzled and very lonely.

It was a perfect night, a half-moon sailing in a jeweled sky, and he would have liked to go somewhere, do something; get away from himself.

He smoked two cigarettes and then ordered another drink. He had made up his mind to take it out onto the terrace. When the bartender served it, Brian picked up the glass, slipped down from the high stool, and turned to go.

How it happened he could never quite make out. He had heard no sound, had no idea anybody was there. But a girl wearing a strapless gown that displayed her creamy arms and shoulders had apparently been standing just behind him. She raised her hand too late. He had spilled most of the whisky and some of the ice all over her.

She stifled a squeal. Reproachful eyes were raised to his. Brian grew hot all over. He called to the bartender:

“Quick! A napkin or something!”

A napkin was produced. The girl took it from his hand, looking aside, and began to dab at her dress and her bare shoulders.

“What can I say?” he fumbled. “Of course I shall replace your dress, which I'm afraid is ruined. But there's no excuse for my clumsiness.”

She glanced at him. “Oh, I doubt that the dress is ruined.” She had a quaint, fascinating accent. “And truly I think I was to blame. I was looking for someone, and how could you know I was right behind you?”

“I should have looked. It was entirely my fault. You must let me drive you to wherever you live, so you can change.” He detected the dawning of a smile stealing across her face. “I suppose you must have a dinner date, but

please allow me to see you tomorrow and fix everything up for a new dress.”

“I live in this hotel. I arrived only today. I can go to my room and change my dress. It will clean quite well. But it is very sweet of you to offer to buy another.”

“That isn’t an offer. It’s a promise!”

She really smiled now, and Brian realized with a sort of shock that she was a very pretty girl indeed.

“Perhaps I won’t hold you to it.” She spoke softly. “It would not be fair.”

“Well leave that for the moment. Maybe, when you’re changed, you’ll find time to have a cocktail with me before you go?”

“Thank you. I am going nowhere. I meant to dine here in the hotel.”

“Then you’ll dine with me?”

“Yes—if you really want it so.”

When she had gone, Brian had his glass refilled.

“Do you know that lady’s name?” he asked the barman.

“No, sir. I never see her before.” He displayed perfect white teeth. “She is a beautiful young lady.”

Brian sipped his whisky, lighted another cigarette. He was trying to figure out why her wonderful eyes seemed to awaken a memory.

She returned much sooner than he had expected. She wore now a green dress that sheathed her lithe figure to the hips like a second skin.

They dined on the terrace, overlooking the Nile. The girl said her name was Zoe Montero, that her family lived in Spanish Morocco. She was on a visit to an aunt and uncle who had a business in Luxor, but who had arranged to meet her in Cairo. She had just received a message saying that her aunt had been taken ill and so they were detained.

“I shall know tomorrow if they can come or if they want me to go up to Luxor,” she told Brian.

They danced in the moonlight, and the dark beauty of his graceful partner stirred Brian’s pulses dangerously. He had decided that she was partly of Arab blood. Zoe’s voice, her quaint accent, her natural gaiety fascinated him. Sometimes when he looked into her eyes, that dormant memory awoke. He tried to grab it—and it was gone.

But he enjoyed the evening. There was no word from Lola. . . .

It was quite early next morning when Mr. Ahmad called and found Brian having a smoke on the terrace.

“I have good news,” he announced. “Sir Denis expects to reach Cairo late this afternoon.”

Mr. Ahmad turned at that moment to bow to a passing acquaintance, or he could hardly have failed to note Brian’s change of expression. All his suspicions had been justified. He had become enmeshed in a cunning plot, a most mysterious plot. If Lola had any part in it he couldn’t be sure. But Peter Wellingham was one of the conspirators, and Mr. Ahmad was another. He was no diplomat and he spoke impetuously:

“But I saw Sir Denis right here in Cairo yesterday!”

The effect of those few words upon Mr. Ahmad was miraculous. He changed color alarmingly, clutched at the edge of the table, and stared like a man who has been struck a body blow.

“You saw him . . . in Cairo. . . .”

Words failed Mr. Ahmad, and Brian could have kicked himself; he knew he had been a fool. He had had the game in his hands and had thrown his chance away. If, as he now had fresh reason to believe, Wellingham and Ahmad were conspiring against Nayland Smith, were no more than spies of the enemy (whoever the enemy might be), he could perhaps have exposed their game by the use of a little tact.

Brian wondered if the situation could yet be saved. He could try.

“Yes.” He spoke easily. “When I was coming back here last night with a friend, our taxi passed a smart English sports car. I think it was a Jaguar. There were two men in it, and one of them was Sir Denis.”

Mr. Ahmad moistened his lips with his tongue. “Where was this?”

“I asked the driver that, as a matter of fact, and he told me we had just passed the British Consulate.”

“The British Consulate,” Mr. Ahmad echoed mechanically, his expression ghastly. “You alarm me, Mr. Merrick. I must make immediate inquiries. Sir Denis’ mission is a vital and dangerous one. He has powerful enemies. It is possible that he has returned secretly for some reason of his own.”

He left soon afterward, a man badly confused, and Brian settled down to try to puzzle out the truth. Mr. Ahmad had behaved like a crook unmasked, but on the other hand, it was possible that there might be a different explanation.

If Ahmad was on the level, he had done the wrong thing.

Dr. Fu Manchu was writing at a large desk of Arab manufacture, most cunningly inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and semiprecious stones. It was loaded with books, racks of test tubes, manuscripts, and certain queer objects not easy to define. Peko, the tiny marmoset, a companion of Fu Manchu's travels, crouched on the Doctor's shoulder, beady eyes moving restlessly.

There was a faint buzzing. A voice spoke.

"Abdul Ahmad is here."

"I will see him."

Dr. Fu Manchu continued to make notes in small, neat characters in the margin of a bulky faded volume until a door opened and Mr. Ahmad came in. He bowed obsequiously, then stood still. Fu Manchu glanced up.

"Yes? You wish to report something?"

"Excellency," Ahmad stammered, "it is that Brian Merrick claims to have seen Nayland Smith last night!"

Dr. Fu Manchu closed the large volume and fixed a glance upon Mr. Ahmad that seemed to freeze him to the floor.

"Tell me what he said, exactly—exactly—and also what *you* said."

Mr. Ahmad evidently had a phenomenal memory, for he repeated the conversation practically word for word under the barely endurable gaze of those strange green eyes.

Dr. Fu Manchu looked down at the emerald signet ring he wore and there was silence. The marmoset broke this silence by uttering one of his whistling cries and leaping to the top of a tall cabinet behind the Chinese doctor, where he sat chattering wickedly at Mr. Ahmad. Fu Manchu spoke.

"Merrick is lying for some reason of his own. There has been bungling. He suspects something. He did not see Nayland Smith where he claims to have seen him. But he may have seen him elsewhere. This we must learn. Vast issues are at stake. Order Zobeida to report to me here immediately."

Mr. Ahmad went out, and shortly afterwards Zobeida came in. Brian would have recognized Zobeida as Zoe Montero.

The memory that had been dodging Brian like a will-o'-the-wisp, came out into the open that evening. He was waiting on the hotel terrace for Zoe. He stood up when he saw her coming. Dusk had fallen and she moved gracefully through shadows, into the light of the moon, and out again. Once,

when she was quite near, in shadow, a stray moonbeam touched her briefly, lighting up her eyes.

And he knew where he had seen those beautiful eyes before. She had been in the shop of old Achmed es-Salah, wearing native dress and veiling her face. She had followed him when he left.

He was entangled in an invisible web. Every move he made was covered. Someone who had known he was going to Achmed's shop had planted the girl there. She was infernally clever, too. That trick in the cocktail bar had been done beautifully.

And he could no longer doubt that Lola also was in the plot.

Zoe smiled and gave him both her hands. She looked very lovely tonight.

"If I kept you waiting I am sorry, Brian. But an old friend of my father's, an Englishman, heard I am in Cairo and called me. He talked for so long. I am thirsty with talking. Please get me a big, cool drink."

Brian clapped his hands for a waiter and gave the order.

"Does this old friend of yours live here in Cairo?" he ventured cautiously.

"Oh, no. He came only yesterday, and from my uncle in Luxor he found out I am here. He is very quick to find things out. He was for many years with the English police."

"Is that right? I suppose he's here on some investigation?"

Zoe shook her head. A waiter brought two tall glasses.

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. But I know from my father that Sir Denis now belongs to the British Secret Service."

She took a long drink and sighed contentedly. Brian tried to tell himself that her remark hadn't stupefied him.

"What's the rest of his name?"

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Brian breathed, and met the regard of wide-open amber eyes.

"What surprises you, Brian?"

"Just that I happen to know him, too."

Zoe smiled delightedly. "That is wonderful! And you didn't know he was here?"

"Well"—he spoke very slowly—"maybe he doesn't know *I'm* here."

He was doing some hard thinking. In that first starting moment of revelation, when he became suddenly convinced that Zoe and the girl in the bazaar were one and the same, which seemed to reveal this bewitching little tramp as an impostor, a spy set to watch him, he had decided what he would do. But this new development threw the whole plan out of gear.

Could he possibly have been wrong all along? Prejudiced by his dislike for Peter Wellingham, he might have jumped to a false conclusion that the girl he had seen with him in Hyde Park was Lola, for he had never actually caught even a glimpse of her face. Still hag-ridden by his suspicions, he might also have assumed wrongly that Zoe and the veiled lady of the bazaar were identical, for no better reason than that both had amber eyes. Amber eyes were not uncommon in the East.

Zoe's claim that she knew Nayland Smith couldn't very well be bogus, or she would have reacted very differently when he told her that he, too, knew Sir Denis.

Where did he stand? Had he misjudged Mr. Ahmad as well?

"You are very thoughtful," Zoe whispered softly. "Don't you like me tonight?"

"My dear Zoe!" They sat side by side on a cushioned cane divan. "I was so surprised that I forgot to tell you how lovely you are."

He put his arm around her shoulders and drew her to him. She smiled, raising pouting lips. And Brian didn't even try to resist the sweet temptation. . . .

Dawn was not so far away when Brian finally turned in that night, and he slept late into the morning. He sent for his mail when he ordered coffee but again there was nothing from Lola.

He was a man who, once his suspicions had been aroused, could never let the matter rest until his doubts were either proved or disproved. If indeed he had become involved in a conspiracy against Nayland Smith, a conspiracy in which Wellingham, Lola, Ahmad, and Zoe were concerned, a love affair with Zoe was the best, and by far the most pleasant, way to find it out.

He had wasted no time.

Zoe, who, for all her youth, he suspected to be far from unsophisticated in love and the ways of lovers, had responded to the point of unconditional surrender. And it was then that Brian began to distrust himself. Never once, even while he caressed her, mingling kisses with what he believed to be

artful leading questions, had she breathed one word that he wanted to hear. He had been equally reticent.

She didn't know if she would see Nayland Smith. She hadn't seen him since she was a child. He hadn't told her where he was staying in Cairo. Sir Denis had met her uncle when he was in Egypt with Sir Lionel Barton, the famous archaeologist, many years ago. Sir Lionel had been excavating a tomb in the Valley of the Kings. And Brian remembered that Nayland Smith had spoken of this very expedition when he had visited their home in Washington.

Brian, being no roué, began to reproach himself. If Zoe was really not a conspirator sent to trap him, he was behaving rather like a cad. He must not pretend to himself that the zeal of the investigator, and not the fact that Zoe was very desirable, inspired his love-making. It wouldn't be true. If he had known beyond all doubt that she was a spy of the enemy, he might have scrapped his scruples. But he didn't know.

He pondered the situation over his morning coffee and smoked a number of Achmed es-Salah's cigarettes. Then he called Mr. Ahmad's number, but failed, as usual, to get a reply. He began to feel like a man lost in a maze.

Two things he made up his mind to do. First, he would call at the address that appeared on top of Ahmad's letter. Second, he would return to the house hidden away in the native town, ring the bell (if there was one), and ask for Sir Nayland Smith.

He took a cab to the address in Sharîa Abdin, which he saw to be a modern office building only a few minutes' walk from the hotel. This made him feel like a fool, and he asked the man to wait while he went in. He found a list of tenants just inside the door and read all the names carefully.

Mr. Ahmad's was not one of them.

Then it occurred to him that Ahmad might be a member of a firm that didn't bear his name at all. As there seemed to be no hall porter, he stepped into the nearest office ("The Loofah Products Co.") and found a smart young Jewess seated before a typewriter.

She greeted him with a brilliant smile. Many women greeted Brian that way.

"Excuse me," Brian began, "but I'm looking for someone called Mr. Ahmad. Can you—"

The smile was wiped out. Dark eyes challenged him. "I'm sorry. There's no one of that name here."

"I'm sorry, too, for troubling you. But, you see, I have a letter from him here"—he produced Ahmad's letter—"and it has this address on it."

The dark eyes melted a little. “There are many offices in the building. Perhaps someone else could help you.”

“I’ll try.” He turned to go.

The girl said more softly, “Try the Azîza Cigarette Corporation, third floor. They’ve been here longer than we have. They may know. But don’t say I sent you.”

Brian swung around, and met the brilliant smile again. “Thanks a million!” He gave her a happy grin.

He was really getting somewhere. The cigarettes he had bought from old Achmed es-Salah were called “Azîza.”

CHAPTER FIVE

THE office of the Azîza Cigarette Corporation was, if anything, even smaller than the one he had just left. An Egyptian youth, incredibly cross-eyed, looked out through a little window. What Brian could see of the room behind this window seemed to indicate that it was totally unfurnished.

“Can I see Mr. Ahmad?” he inquired.

The young Egyptian looked blank, “Nobody here.”

“Are you expecting Mr. Ahmad?”

“Don’t know him, sir. Don’t know any of the gentlemen.”

Brian frowned irritably. “What do you mean? You must know who employs you.”

“Why for sure, sir. Mr. Quintero pays me to come here every morning and collect the letters. This business it has moved to Alex. This office is for renting.”

He looked proud of having given so much information.

“Who’s Mr. Quintero?”

“The landlord, sir.”

“Is he in the building?”

“No, sir. He lives in Gezira. I go there now.”

Brian turned abruptly and walked out. This game of blind man’s buff was beginning to get on his nerves. He couldn’t very well call at every office in the building and inquire for Mr. Ahmad.

When he went out to the street he nearly fell over an old beggar seated on the ground right beside the doorway. This ragged object stood up. “*Bakshîsh,*” he whined, his hand stretched out.

Brian walked across to the waiting *arabîyeh*.

“Do you know the house of the Sherîf Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf?” he asked the driver.

The man looked startled. “Yes, sir. But this house not open to visitors.”

“Never mind. I want to go there.”

Brian turned to open the door. But the old mendicant had it open already. “*Bakshîsh,* my gentleman.”

Again the eager hand was extended. Brian threw him a coin as the cab was driven away.

Before long he found himself once more in the odorous, noisy, narrow streets of the Oriental city. Here were the hawkers of fruit, vegetables, lemon water, and what not, intoning their time-worn cries, descendants of those who had hawked the same wares and cried the same calls when Harûn-al-Raschîd ruled Egypt from Baghdad.

Before the iron gate his driver pulled up. "This is house of the Seyyîd Mohammed."

Brian got out and tried the gate. It was locked. He could see nothing resembling a doorbell, and was wondering what to do next when he realized that a man had come out of the house and was ponderously approaching.

He was a fat fellow with a large, shiny face expressionless as a side of bacon. He wore native dress and a large white turban. Standing close to the locked gate, he said something in a fluty voice that Brian didn't understand.

"I want to see the Sherîf Mohammed," Brian told him.

The fat man shook his head, turned, and slowly walked back again.

Brian rattled the bars angrily. "Did you hear me?" he shouted.

The fat man went in, but came out almost at once with another man, and pointed to the gate. The second man, dressed in black and wearing a red tarboosh, was slight and intelligent looking. He hurried forward.

"You wish to see the Seyyîd Mohammed, sir?" He spoke in English.

"Urgently. My name is Merrick, Brian Merrick. I'm a friend of Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

The man unlocked the gate and stood aside for Brian to go in. Then he locked it again. And Brian experienced a pang of apprehension, almost a physical chill, when he realized that his exit from this house was barred. He turned and called to the driver:

"Wait for me!"

"Will you come this way, please?"

Brian followed on into the house, which was evidently very old. From a tiled apartment in which a small fountain tinkled he was led upstairs to a lofty room lighted partly by an opening in the painted ceiling and partly by sunshine filtering through the lattices of two recessed windows. The floor was tiled, but several rugs were strewn about on it. His guide pointed to a divan.

"Please wait a few moments, Mr. Merrick. I will inform the Seyyîd that you are here."

He walked out, closing the door behind him.

Brian began to examine the room more carefully. Glancing behind him, he saw a window fitted with bars. He crossed to it and looked out. Then he knew. He was in the room in which he had seen Nayland Smith.

It was easy now to recognize the two *mushrabîyeh* windows. But something else he saw puzzled him. High up in a wall was an opening like a small window covered with a grille of ornamental wrought iron. He couldn't imagine what purpose it served, but it had an ominous look. There seemed to be only one door to the room, and this door, for he tried it, had been quietly locked by the man in the red tarboosh when he went out. That sensation of physical chill stole over Brian again.

Perhaps Sir Denis was a prisoner in this strange, silent house, and he, Brian, had been cunningly lured into the same trap.

He was still staring up at the iron grille, his brain feverishly active and bubbling with wild theories, when the door opened very quietly and a man came in. Brian turned to face him.

He saw a venerable and arresting figure: a tall man, with heavy brows overhanging piercing dark eyes, a pure-white beard, and the bearing of one used to respect. He wore native dress and a closely wound green turban.

"I am Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf. You wished to see me?" The words were spoken in perfect English.

"I certainly did!"

"Please be seated, and tell me how I may serve you."

Brian returned to the divan, and the Sherîf seated himself cross-legged on a large ottoman facing him. His unwavering regard Brian found very disconcerting.

"My name is Merrick."

"So I am told, Mr. Merrick."

"I'm a friend of Sir Denis Nayland Smith, and I'm here to ask you to be good enough to let me see him."

The gaze of the dark eyes never left his face. "Did Sir Denis notify you that he was here, Mr. Merrick?"

"No. I saw him, right here in this room!"

"A singular accident. Where were you at the time?"

"On the roof of a house right opposite."

"Indeed? It was fortunate that you, and no one else, observed him. But the ways of the All-Knowing are inscrutable." He touched his brow, his lips, and his breast in a gesture that reminded Brian of a Roman Catholic making

the sign of the cross. “Sir Denis is in great danger, Mr. Merrick, and his health is impaired. He sought sanctuary in my house, for he knows me well.”

Brian felt like someone drowning who finds himself dragged to the surface. Here was a clean explanation at last of the mystery that had baffled him. For it was impossible to doubt the assurance of this dignified old man.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Can I see him?”

“Not this morning, I regret to say. I am, as I presume you know, a physician. Sir Denis has placed himself under my care and the course of treatment I have prescribed will not be completed until this evening. If I think it wise, I will allow him to call upon you tonight. No doubt he knows where you are lodged?”

“He does. I may count on that, sir?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Merrick. He is sleeping at the moment. I am treating him for nervous exhaustion. Directly he awakes, I shall inform him of your call.”

As the courtyard gate closed with a slight metallic clang upon the visitor’s departure, Dr. Fu Manchu opened the door of a closet and came out. The back of it accommodated the grille that, from below on the other side, had caught Brian’s attention. The doctor walked down a short flight of stairs and into a room that was part laboratory and part study. A tall cabinet with a rounded top swung inward at his touch, and where it had been an arched opening appeared.

He stepped through, with his silent, curiously catlike step, and glanced around the lofty apartment in which Brian had interviewed the Sherif Mohammed. That dignified descendant of the Prophet was waiting for him and bowed as he came in. Fu Manchu, his crossed hands hidden in the sleeves of his robe, watched him.

“It was well done, Mohammed.” He spoke softly, in English. “And even better that we were prepared for such an emergency. Brian Merrick is an almost irreplaceable unit in my plan, but had you stumbled or faltered, I fear we should nevertheless have been forced to dispense with him.”

The Sherif Mohammed hesitated, and then said, “His transparent honesty is a great asset to us. He would be hard to replace. If he had insisted upon seeing Nayland Smith, I should have lost my control of him. The promise I made was the only alternative.”

“And it shall be carried out. Matsukata is not ready, but the risk must be taken.”

The Sherîf bowed. “The urgency is great, Excellency. Inquiries reached me only an hour ago from Moscow concerning the lack of a report from Gorodin. If we lose Soviet confidence it might mean the abandonment of our plan.”

Dr. Fu Manchu laughed. It was strange, chilling laughter.

“Soviet confidence!” He spoke softly, almost hissing. “We have had one instance of their *confidence*! How little they suspect, Mohammed, that we and not they hold the East in our hands! How many times have I offered them my cooperation? How many times have they wisely declined it? But at last they have accepted . . . their ruin!”

The Sherîf inclined his head. “Doubtless Excellency will deal with the inquiry himself?”

“It may be left to me. But tonight Sir Denis Nayland Smith must pay a brief visit to Mr. Brian Merrick. Cancel my instructions to Zobeida.”

Brian was smoking on the terrace of the hotel after lunch when he was joined by Mr. Ahmad.

“My dear sir!” Ahmad sat down beside him. “How you startled me with your story of having seen Sir Denis in an English car! You must be psychic.”

“How do you mean?”

“Because, although I cannot learn if he uses such a car, it is beyond dispute that he was in Cairo at that time. I have traced him to the house of the Seyyîd Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf, an old friend of Sir Denis’. He is living there *incognito*, from motives of safety.”

“I know,” Brian answered shortly. “You might have told me so earlier if I had been able to find you. Listen. Where is your office located? And why can I never get any reply when I call your number?”

Mr. Ahmad spread his palms apologetically. “You have been looking for me?”

“Certainly. I could find nobody in the place who knew you.”

“I am sorry. I have no office there. It is an accommodation address that I use when business brings me to Cairo. The number you have is that of a friend who lives in a small flat on top of the building.”

“And who’s never home!”

Ahmad laughed. “You have perhaps been unlucky, Mr. Merrick. Entirely my fault. Please excuse me. You have already talked to Sir Denis?”

“No. But I expect to meet him this evening.”

“So I came to tell you. But it seems you have anticipated me. You will of course make a point of not leaving the hotel until you have seen him?”

“Of course.”

“Then I must leave you. I have urgent business to deal with, concerning Sir Denis’ future plans. Concerning your own duties, no doubt he will inform you.”

Brian wasn’t sorry when Mr. Ahmad went. Whatever might be the position Ahmad held in Nayland Smith’s organization, he couldn’t shake off a feeling of distrust of the man. He took a book out into a shady corner of the garden and settled down to do nothing until cocktail time. He had little exercise these days, apart from a morning swim, and so far had found no time to do any sightseeing. He wondered how much longer he would be in Cairo. There were so many things he wanted to do.

He was half dozing over his book when a boy came to look for him. He was wanted on the phone.

It was Zoe. “Oh, Brian, I am so sorry. My uncle from Luxor will be here this evening and I cannot see you. Perhaps I will have to go back with him. I don’t know.”

“I hope not, Zoe. I doubt if I could find time to get up to Luxor, much as I’d like to. But as it happens, *I’m* tied up this evening, too. I have to wait here for Sir Denis.”

“So he found you! I knew he would. You may give him my love, but don’t tell him how much love I give *you!*”

Brian heard her musical laugh. “When shall I know if you’re going to Luxor?”

“As soon as I find out. Perhaps tonight.” She wafted a kiss over the wire.

Brian returned to his seat in the garden. He thought about Zoe, tried to read, tried to keep himself awake by watching other visitors who strolled about. But at last the restful, warm air and the drone of the insects conquered, and he fell asleep. He dreamed he was being bitten by thousands of mosquitoes and woke up to find that the dream was based on fact.

A boy was shaking him by the shoulder. “Phone, sir.”

And when he got there and said, “Hello?” a snappy voice replied, “Brian Merrick, Junior?”

“Yes.”

“Nayland Smith here. How are you, Merrick? Don’t bother to tell me. Listen. I’m in a hell of a position, and you’re in it with me. At eight o’clock—exactly *eight o’clock*—wait in your room. Leave the door ajar. Don’t tell me the number—I know it. At eight o’clock, with the door ajar. Good-by.”

After an early dinner, Brian went up to his room. A bottle of Scotch, a supply of soda water, and an ice bucket were there by his orders. Feeling oddly taut, he sampled the whisky while he waited.

At three minutes to eight he heard the elevator stop at his floor, the clang of the opening gate. Someone stepped out, walked briskly toward his door . . . and passed it. Another door was unlocked some distance away, and closed.

Silence.

And this almost unbearable silence remained unbroken until a very slight creaking disturbed it—and the slit of light shining in from the hall began to grow wider.

Brian shot up from his chair. “Who’s there?” he challenged.

A man came in and closed the door. It was Nayland Smith.

He wore a light topcoat with the collar turned up and a soft-brimmed hat, the brim pulled down. Brian sprang to meet him.

“Sir Denis! At last!”

“One moment, Merrick. Wait till I get to the window and then switch the lights off.” He crossed the room. “Lights out!”

Brian, utterly confused, obeyed the snappy order. Complete darkness came, until it was dispersed by faint streaks of light as Nayland Smith moved the slats of the Venetian blind.

“What’s the idea?” Brian asked.

“Lights up. Wanted to know if you’re overlooked.” The room became illuminated again. “We’re dealing with clever people who mean to stop us, and I’m Target Number One. Ha! Scotch! Just what I need.”

He dropped his coat and hat on the carpet beside a cane chair and started to sit down. Then, as an afterthought, he stretched out his hand.

“Glad to see you, Merrick. How’s your father?”

Brian grinned as he grasped the extended hand. This was the Nayland Smith he remembered, and yet, in some way, a changed Nayland Smith. His snappy, erratic style of speech, sometimes so disconcerting, remained the same as ever. The change was in his expression. He had the kind of tan that never completely wears off, but through it Brian seemed to see that he had

become unhealthily pale. His features, too, were almost haggard, and he wore a thin strip of surgical plaster across the bridge of his nose.

As he mixed two stiff drinks, Brian said, "My father is well, thank you, and sends his best wishes. But I'm told you have been a sick man, Sir Denis."

"Right. Do I look it?"

"You look fit enough now, but I can see you've been through a tough time."

"I owe my life, Merrick, to the Seyyîd Mohammed. The man's a master physician. Lucky for me I knew him. Those devils were hard on my heels when I got to his house. They'd penetrated my disguise, you see."

Brian handed him his drink and sat down facing him.

"I'm afraid I *don't* see, Sir Denis. I've been walking in circles ever since I was selected for this job. I don't know what I have to do. I don't know what you're up against. I'm honored and delighted to be with you, whatever the game may be, but I do want very much to know what it's all about. Peter Wellingham wouldn't tell me. I wouldn't have taken the job if I hadn't happened to know you already."

Nayland Smith, who wore gray flannel trousers and an old sports jacket, pulled out from one of the large pockets an outsize tobacco pouch and began to stuff some rough-cut mixture into the bowl of a very charred brier pipe.

"Then it's good you did," he said. "Wellingham couldn't tell you much because he doesn't know much. The fewer people who know about this, the better. First, you might like to know how I got in? Service entrance. Walked up the stairs."

"Why?"

"*He* knows you're here to join me, Merrick."

"He? Who's he?"

"Dr. Fu Manchu. You've heard me talk to your father about him. He's the biggest menace the Western world has ever had to cope with. He has the brain of a genius and the soul of Satan. He's stronger today than he ever was. His agents are everywhere, in every corner of the world. This building is certainly covered. So are you. Either one of us might disappear tonight!"

"Good God!"

"It's a fact. I can't show myself in Cairo till I've got in touch with the British authorities. So far they don't know I'm here. After that, we'll both have official protection. Abdul Ahmad is an old worker of mine. He's sworn to secrecy. So is the Seyyîd Mohammed."

He dropped the pouch back in his pocket and lighted his pipe. Brian stared.

“This is a deeper mystery than ever, Sir Denis. You were on your way back from the Far East, I guess—”

Nayland Smith shook his head. “East Berlin.”

“Berlin! Then whatever brought you to Cairo?”

“I wasn’t alone, Merrick. The man I had rescued from behind the Iron Curtain was with me. My mission was financed by Washington. United States agents had reported that Dr. Otto Hessian, the world-famous physicist, was held a prisoner, working under compulsion on an invention calculated to end nuclear warfare.”

“Didn’t England want him?”

“His results will be shared by both governments. We got into France. I planned to cross the sea from Le Havre to New York. In fact, we were on our way to the *Liberté’s* dock when a car passed our cab going the same way.”

Nayland Smith’s pipe went out. He stopped to relight it.

“Yes?” Brian spoke excitedly.

“There was only one passenger in the car. It was Dr. Fu Manchu.”

CHAPTER SIX

ENTHRALLED by all he had heard, and awed by the responsibility that he had been chosen to share with Sir Denis, Brian was about to speak when Nayland Smith raised his hand.

“*Ssh*. Listen!”

He seemed to be watching the closed door. Brian watched it, too. But he saw and heard nothing.

“What?”

“Wait a moment. I may be wrong, but . . .”

Nayland Smith moved quietly across the room until he could press his ear to a panel of the door. Then, very gently, he opened it and looked out. He closed it again silently and came back.

“Too late. There was certainly someone there. Let’s hope they don’t know I’m here! I must be brief, but I want to bring you up to date. We doubled back to Paris and flew to Cairo. Dr. Hessian needed rest, facilities, and safety to complete his plans for a laboratory demonstration. I knew he could find all this with the Seyyîd Mohammed. Also, I was rather shaken. As you see”—he touched his nose—“Had a spot of trouble in Berlin.”

The phone rang.

“Be careful!” Nayland Smith warned as Brian took the call.

It was Zoe.

“Brian dear, I can only speak for a moment. But I do not have to leave Cairo for another week! Are you glad?”

“Very glad indeed.”

“I will call you in the morning.”

With the sound of a kiss, Zoe hung up. Brian turned and met a quizzical stare from Nayland Smith.

“Evidently a lady,” he snapped in his dry fashion.

Brian grinned rather guiltily. “As a matter of fact, Sir Denis, it was someone you know. Zoe Montero.”

Nayland Smith smiled. It wasn’t quite the boyish smile that Brian seemed to remember, but he had to allow for the fact that Sir Denis had

obviously been through hell, although he treated his troubles lightly.

“Little Zoe? Her uncle and I became close friends some years ago when I was up in Luxor. She’s a sweet little girl, and I know she’s safe with you. And now I must be off.” He stooped, picked up his coat and hat, and put them on. “Never go out alone, Merrick. And lock your door at night.”

“I’ll go down with you, Sir Denis.”

“Not on your life! You’re the last man in Cairo I want to be seen with. Look—walk along to the lift, and when you get there, just open the door opposite—the one with a red light above it—and make sure there’s nobody on the stair. If all’s clear, pretend to press the bell for the lift, and don’t pay any attention to me when I go by you. A last word—don’t worry if you hear nothing from me for a day or two. And for heaven’s sake, don’t attempt to contact me. Enjoy yourself with Zoe. She doesn’t know you’re working with me?”

“I never told her so.”

“Never do! Good night.”

When Nayland Smith had gone in his mysterious way, Brian sat down to try to get these new developments into focus.

One thing was crystal clear: He had let himself in for quite a job. He was up to his ears in an international intrigue that obviously involved the whole Western world. He thrilled to the prospect, but he asked himself if he felt competent to go through with it. Something more than mere physical courage was called for.

Did he possess those extra qualities? And was he justified in taking it for granted that he did when nothing in his life to date had given him an opportunity to find out?

He believed he had a fairly good brain, but he wasn’t vain enough to pretend that it was a first-class brain. Yet, according to Nayland Smith, he was soon to find himself in the ring against an opponent who had the brain of a criminal genius. In such a contest, of what use could he be to Sir Denis?

Evidently Peter Wellingham had decided that he was the very man Sir Denis was looking for, so that, although he didn’t recognize the fact, he must possess some qualification that was necessary.

What could it be?

So far he had been asked to do nothing. He wondered how long that state of affairs would have lasted if he hadn’t blundered upon Sir Denis’ hiding place.

And now it appeared he had *carte blanche* to do as he pleased for the next few days. Yet Nayland Smith had warned him that his every move was covered.

Brian took another drink.

He decided that if he were to prove a success as a secret agent, he must learn to control his hasty judgments. Men engaged in such perilous work were sure to move in an aura of mystery, for danger surrounded them. Making a bad beginning by distrusting Peter Wellingham, he had transferred his doubts to Lola, who had nothing to do with the matter, then to Ahmad, and finally to little Zoe.

Thinking of Zoe reminded him of the fact that he owed her a new dress. He would take her out shopping in the morning. Then they would lunch at Mena House and visit the Great Pyramid, an old ambition of Brian's.

He hoped she would call him when she got back, or better still, come to his room. He settled down to write a report to his father of his first meeting here with Sir Denis Nayland Smith and his impressions of that remarkable man.

Midnight drew near before the long letter was finished, and Brian felt very sleepy. Zoe hadn't called, and he settled for a final drink and bed. He fell asleep almost immediately.

Perhaps, as he thought afterwards, it was his concentration on the character and strange life of Sir Denis while he was writing the letter that caused him to have such a singular and very disturbing dream.

He found himself in a state of unaccountable and helpless panic, incapable of movement or speech. It was a condition he had never experienced in reality, and for that reason was all the more horrible. Nayland Smith was pacing up and down the room in which he, Brian, had interviewed the Sherif Mohammed, exactly as he had seen him from the roof of the neighboring building. But, in the dream, Brian was in the room too, and could hear as well as see. And the first sound he heard came from behind the iron grille high in one wall. It was a strange, harsh, but dreadfully compelling voice:

"You have crossed my path once too often, Sir Denis. The time has come for me to order, for you to obey."

The vision faded. Brian was in Zoe's arms. "Brian!" she whispered, trembling. "Brian, listen to me! Leave here at once. I love you, but you must go. Promise me you will go!" But he couldn't utter a word. He was dumb with fright. Then the harsh voice came again. "Do you dare to forget who is

your master?" Some unseen force dragged Zoe away. "Brian!" he heard "Brian! Answer me!"

And Nayland Smith was there again, not in the lofty saloon, but in a small room, stone-paved, like a dungeon. He was chained by his ankle to a staple in the stone wall. Haggard eyes watched Brian.

"Don't do it, Merrick. Give me your word."

And Brian could only gasp, mumble. Not one word could he utter.

A sound of banging reached him. He couldn't move. He was no longer in the stone cell. He was lying in darkness so complete that a ghastly idea crossed his mind: He had been buried alive!

The banging went on. Someone was trying to break into his tomb. A voice came faintly, from a long way off:

"Brian! Brian! Are you there? Answer me."

It was Zoe. Still he was unable to make a sound. The banging faded.

That frightful oppression seemed to be lifting. He found he could move; he stretched out his arm. And in doing so he nearly upset the reading lamp. He was in bed!

He switched on the light, got up, and ran to the door, which he had forgotten to lock. That banging sound and Zoe's voice still echoed in his ears. He opened the door and looked out. There was no one there.

His wrist watch recorded three A.M. His pajama jacket was damp with cold perspiration.

He fell asleep again analyzing this strange nightmare while it was still fresh in his memory. And finally he read it to be a sort of panorama of the half-submerged doubts and fears that had haunted him so long. He saw them now as myths of his imagination, but while they had been present in his mind they were as real as the horrors of the dream.

The next time he woke up, blazing Egyptian sunshine was peering in through the slats of the window blinds, and he could hear the familiar noises of the busy street below his balcony. The terrors of the night were finally dispersed by a cold shower.

While he drank his coffee and enjoyed the first cigarette, he called Zoe. She answered at once, and he thought her voice sounded rather listless.

"You were out disgracefully late," he told her with mock severity.

He heard her laugh. "It is true, Brian. But it was not the gay time you think. There is so much family trouble to talk about. My poor Aunt Isobel, my father's sister, has been very ill. She cannot have me yet at Luxor,

although she is getting better. I told you last night that I am to stay here a while. Are you glad?"

"Of course I'm glad, dear! Very glad. Listen. Are you free for lunch? Because I want you to lunch with me at Mena House and then go and explore the Great Pyramid. O.K.?"

"O.K., Brian! When shall I be ready?"

"Is eleven-thirty too early?"

"No. Downstairs at eleven-thirty."

And at eleven-thirty Zoe came down to the lounge wearing a cream dress that left her arms and shoulders bare. They were slightly sun-tanned. A large sun hat shaded her face, and she looked even more lovely than usual.

The drive out to Gizeh was all too short. He held her close in the near privacy of the cab, and this morning, for some mysterious reason, Zoe thrilled him in a new way.

They had some drinks in the Mena House bar and then went in to a cold luncheon. Afterwards they took their coffee out in the garden, choosing a shady table near the flower-draped wall overlooking the road.

Zoe became strangely pensive. Several times Brian caught her glancing at him furtively, as if wanting to tell him something that she hesitated to put into words.

"Zoe," he said uneasily, "Something's bothering you. Tell me what it is."

Still she hesitated, glancing around as if she was afraid of being overheard. Brian reached across and took both of her hands. "Tell me, Zoe. What is it?"

"It is something very, very hard to say, Brian."

He had an uneasy moment. "You don't mean—you don't want to see me any more?"

She shook her head. "It is not as you think, Brian. I want to see you always. It is that I have to ask you something that breaks my heart, but for *your* sake I must ask."

Brian became really alarmed by her earnestness. Her wonderful eyes were so bright that he knew tears were not far away. "Whatever do you mean, dear?"

"I mean—" she paused, as if seeking the right words. "I mean that, although it will be terrible for me if—someone—finds out what I have done, I *must* warn you, Brian. You are in very, very great danger. Soon it will be too late. I hate to say it, but, please—oh, please!—leave Cairo at once. Tonight, if you can."

This incomprehensible request so completely baffled Brian that for some moments he could think of no reply. Part of his dream had come true. Zoe had turned her eyes aside, but tears were gathering on her long, dark lashes; her hands, which he held tightly, were shaking.

He wondered if she had seen Nayland Smith since he had seen him, if it could be something Sir Denis had told her that accounted for her present state of mind. Then it occurred to him that it was odd she hadn't asked him about Sir Denis' visit, for he remembered telling her he expected him. He wasn't dreaming now, yet all this had happened before.

"This would mean—if I did it—that we shouldn't see each other again?" He spoke in a toneless voice, trying to think.

Zoe didn't answer. She suddenly dragged her hands away. Her eyes were wide with terror. She pointed to the low wall beside which they sat.

"Brian!" she whispered. "Down there—I heard someone move!"

Brian sprang up. He leaned over the wall and looked down. Zoe was right.

A ragged old mendicant sat on the dusty road, his back propped against the wall, immediately below their table.

"Hi, you! What are you doing down there?" Brian shouted.

A skinny, dirty hand was stretched out "*Bakshîsh—bakshîsh!*"

Brian caught his breath. He leaned farther over. "Let me have a look at you."

The old beggar looked up. One glance was enough.

He saw the man who had been seated beside the door of the office building in Sharîa Abdin when Brian came out after his useless search for Mr. Ahmad—the man who had been holding open the cab door when he directed the driver to take him to the house of the Sherif Mohammed.

Brian could no longer doubt that he was closely covered, and in all probability had been from the moment of his arrival in Cairo. He had been right about this all along, but had suspected the wrong persons.

Nayland Smith knew, for Nayland Smith had warned him. And clearly Zoe knew of his danger. How she had come to know he couldn't imagine. But she was evidently aware of the fact that in urging him to run for it, she herself might become enmeshed.

Here were very troubled waters; for whatever might be the source of her information, whatever underlay her queer reticence, that Zoe's warning had been desperately sincere he couldn't doubt. She was in a state of terror, and first he must do his best to reassure her about the eavesdropper.

He dismissed the old beggar, then sat down again and forced what he feared might be a parody of his usual happy grin.

“There is someone there. Who is it?” He saw how pale she had become.

“Nobody to worry about, dear. Just a dirty old beggar. I dropped him an English shilling and told him to go take a long walk.”

“He was listening,” she whispered. “He heard me.”

“I don’t believe he understands a word of English.”

“But I heard you say, ‘Let me have a look at you.’ Did he look?”

“He just knew I was mad at him and looked up. It doesn’t mean he knows English.”

Zoe’s amber eyes blazed. “He was listening. You *know* he was listening!”

Brian tried to think clearly. “Suppose he was, Zoe. And suppose he does know English. What have you to worry about?”

She turned her head aside, so that the brim of her hat shadowed her face. “I cannot explain to you, Brian. What was told to me was told in confidence. For your sake I speak. If it is found out it could be terrible. But you can do nothing about it. Just do as I ask. Do not stay here one hour longer than you can help.”

“I don’t know where you got hold of the idea that I’m in danger, but isn’t it possible you’re getting all worked up over nothing?”

She turned, and her eyes challenged him. “It is *not* over nothing! Could it be for nothing that I beg you to go away when I want you to stay with me? How can you think this?”

Brian realized at last that Zoe was in a state of tremendous nervous tension. His well-meant but perhaps clumsy attempt to soothe her fears had only increased this. He must change his tactics. The situation was utterly fantastic, but he knew that the danger was real enough.

“I guess you’d like to get back.” He spoke uneasily. “I’ll try to contact Sir Denis.”

“It will be no use,” Zoe whispered. “But—yes, let me go, Brian.”

There was such black despair in her voice that he felt chilled. A cloud seemed to darken the Egyptian sunshine. He stood up, walked around the table, and rested his hands on Zoe’s bowed shoulders.

“Don’t let it get you down, Zoe. I’ll go in and order a car right away to take us back to Cairo.”

She reached up and held both his hands. “Not to Cairo, Brian. To Port Said, where we can find a ship. Do this and I will come with you. Leave

your things at the hotel. It will be better—for you and for me. I am not mad. I know what I say. Do it—do it, Brian!”

“But Zoe, dear, tonight—”

“Tonight is too late. It is now or never. Oh, it is hopeless!” She thrust his hands away. “I can never make you understand! Go, then. I will wait here.”

His brain whirling like a carrousel, Brian went into the hotel and arranged for a car. He could no longer delude himself. The ragged old ruffian he had found seated in the road was a spy, and he had been there to listen to their conversation. Zoe knew it, and her panic was clear enough evidence of the menace overhanging them.

He toyed longingly with the temptation to accept her warning. She had become more than ever desirable. She was beautiful, and a delightful companion, responding to all his moods. And in all they did together she was graceful and accomplished.

But it was morally unthinkable that he should break his contract with Sir Denis—particularly now, when Nayland Smith needed him.

He walked slowly back to the garden and along to their table. But Zoe wasn't there.

Brian felt his heart jump and then seem to stop for a moment. He sat down, looking at the empty chair. And by degrees he recovered himself. He, too, was giving way to panic. No doubt she had merely gone into the hotel to prepare herself for the drive.

This theory kept him quiet for five, ten, fifteen minutes. Then he decided that it was wrong.

He went in to make inquiries. But no one had seen her. He went back to the deserted table.

A boy walked down the path, and Brian jumped up.

“Your car is waiting, sir.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

DR. FU MANCHU, seated on a divan in the saloon of the old house near the mosque of El Ashraf, gazed straight before him like a man in a trance. A sickly smell of opium hung in the still air. The long, hypnotic eyes were narrowed. Sometimes a film seemed to pass across them and then was gone, leaving them brilliantly green.

He roused himself and struck a small gong that stood on a table beside him. Immediately a stocky Burmese with a caste mark on his forehead came in and bowed deeply. Fu Manchu spoke to him in his own language:

“Is Zobeida here?”

“She is here, Master.”

“Send her in to me.”

The man went out, and almost immediately Zoe came in. She was dressed as she had been dressed at Mena House, except that she no longer wore her hat. Although pale, she was quite composed. It was the composure of resignation.

Without attempting to meet the glance that Fu Manchu fixed upon her, she dropped to her knees and lowered her head. There was a long silence in the saloon. Then Fu Manchu commanded harshly in Arabic, “Look up. Speak!”

Zoe looked up. “I have nothing to say, Master.” She lowered her head again.

“To *me*, you mean, little serpent! But Abdûl al-Taleb reports that you had much to say to Mr. Brian Merrick. Be so good as to tell me with what object you tried deliberately to disturb my plans.”

“I was sorry for him.”

Dr. Fu Manchu took a pinch of snuff from a little silver box, but never once ceased to watch the kneeling girl.

“There is no room for these moods of compassion in those who work for the Si-Fan. I bought you in an Arabian slave market. I bought you for your beauty. A beautiful woman is a valuable weapon. But the blade must be true. You were trained to take your place in any walk of society. You have all the necessary accomplishments. Neither time nor money was spared in

perfecting you for my purpose. Yet, like another I trained and trusted, you betrayed me.”

Zoe raised her hands to her face.

“Whispered words,” the remorseless voice went on, “a man’s caresses, and those years of patient training became wasted years in as many minutes. Yet, Zobeida, this was not by any means the first assignment given you. Always before you have done well. Tell me, Zobeida, are you afflicted by the delusion miscalled *love*?”

He gave to “love” so scornful an intonation that Zoe shrank even lower. She was trembling now. Her answer was a whisper.

“This one is so young, and without experience, Master. He is not like those others.”

Dr. Fu Manchu considered her silently for a moment “Had you spoken the unforgivable words ‘I *love* him,’ I should have sent for whips. It would have meant that you were of no future use, and therefore lash marks on your smooth skin would no longer have concerned me. But—you have betrayed the plans of the Si-Fan.”

Zoe looked up. “I have not! He knows nothing of your plans, for even had I wanted to, I could have told him nothing. He knows that I think he is in danger, that he should go away.”

“With *you*, unless I misunderstood Abdul, who was listening.”

Zoe dropped her head again. “I would not have gone farther than Port Said. I would not have dared. I merely thought that if I said this, he might be tempted to listen to me.”

“Your desire to guide this attractive young man into the straight and narrow path is most touching. Fortunately, I was able to take instant steps to check further confidences.” Fu Manchu spoke softly. “Go to your room. You will not be returning to the hotel.”

A faint hope that Zoe, piqued by his refusal to take her strange advice, might have found an empty cab at Mena House and returned alone to Cairo was disappointed when he got back to his hotel. She had not come in.

Brian went up to his room and paced about like a madman.

He had not dreamed. He had seen a vision. Could it be that the rest of it was true? Had Nayland Smith fallen into a trap?

Whichever way he looked he could see nothing but darkness. He smoked several cigarettes, had several drinks. In desperation, he called Mr. Ahmad’s

number. There was no reply.

He was wondering what to do next when his phone rang. He grabbed it.

“Oh, Brian dear!” It was Zoe! “I cannot tell you how unhappy I am. My uncle found out from the hotel porter where we had gone and came out by car to Mena House to get me. There was not one moment to lose. My poor Aunt Isobel is dying and has asked for me. So we rushed for the train. I am at the station now. . . . The train is just coming in! I must run.” He heard the sound of a kiss. “Good-by, Brian.”

“But, Zoe—”

She had gone.

Mr. Ahmad called early in the morning. He found Brian on the terrace, looking wretched, toying with biscuits and cheese and a cup of coffee—apparently his breakfast. Mr. Ahmad sat down in a cane chair.

“You are not feeling so well, Mr. Merrick?”

“Thank you. I feel fine.”

“You looked, or so I thought, unhappy. Yes?”

Brian stared hard at Mr. Ahmad. Mr. Ahmad forced a smile of sympathy.

“Shall I tell you something?” Brian asked. “I’m sick to death of all this mystery business. I’m told there’s a serious danger threatening the Western world. I’m told that I’m a marked man. Queer things happen. And I’m left alone to think it all out. What kind of game is this? I can never get in touch with you, and Sir Denis orders me not to try to contact *him!*”

Ahmad shrugged. “Forgive me if I fail to follow you, I cannot know what took place between Sir Denis and yourself. I was not there. If your personal expenses have embarrassed you, I think I can promise that something can be arranged.”

“It’s not a question of money.”

“Then of what?”

“Of self-respect, I guess. I find out I have a spy on my tail. I’d like to report it, but there’s no one to report to. I’m supposed to be on this thing, but I’m left sitting outside.”

Even as he spoke so bitterly he was well aware that the real cause of his bitterness was the strange disappearance of Zoe. Her words, when she had called him, had sounded false, unreal. Either she had been playing a double game all along, and had now gone off with some unknown man she really

loved, or she had been abducted, had been forced to speak to him in order to put him off the scent.

He asked abruptly, "Could you deliver a message from me to Sir Denis?"

"But certainly. With pleasure." But Mr. Ahmad spoke in a curiously uneasy way.

"If you can see him, why not I?"

Mr. Ahmad now looked unmistakably embarrassed. Brian could see that he was trying hard to think up an answer to that one. At last he said. "I can only obey Sir Denis' orders, Mr. Merrick. Surely you know that he thinks it important, until his plans are complete, that no connection between you should be suspected."

"Yes, I know that. But unless my hotel phone is tapped, why can't I call him?"

Mr. Ahmad leaned forward, his expression very earnest. "Has Sir Denis told you where he is?"

"Yes. I knew, anyway. I didn't tell you at the time, because I thought maybe he didn't want me to know yet."

Ahmad forced a smile. "It was discreet, for I myself was in ignorance of his presence in Cairo at that time. But now that you know, Mr. Merrick, I ask you: Is it likely that such a household would have a telephone?"

Brian snapped, "I never heard of a doctor who didn't."

"But the Seyyîd Mohammed no longer practices medicine. He does not accept patients now, except in an emergency such as this, and as a special mark of friendship."

Brian said, "Yes, that's true. I'd forgotten. Well, if I write a note, will you see that Sir Denis gets it?" He stubbed out his cigarette in an ash tray.

"Most certainly. May I offer you one of mine?" Ahmad held out a gold case. "They are different from yours. Unusual. But you may like them."

"Thanks."

Brian took one. It was an Azîza. He accepted the offer of Mr. Ahmad's lighter and went in to write his note. But he sat at the desk a long time, pen in hand, before beginning to write. Was it another coincidence that the girl in the Loofah office had advised him to inquire for Mr. Ahmad at the Azîza Cigarette Company? And was it a still further coincidence that a spy whom he had mistaken for Zoe had followed him from the shop of the merchant in the Mûski who claimed to be the sole Cairo agent for the sale of those cigarettes?

He sighed, looked once more at the name of the cigarette, and puffed at it deeply. He began to write. Above all things he mustn't let his imagination run away with him again.

When he was finished he went back to the terrace and handed the note to Mr. Ahmad.

"I shall see that this is placed in Sir Denis' hands not later than noon," Ahmad promised.

"Fine. Now how about a drink?"

"Many thanks, but it is much too early for me. What I really came to tell you is that Sir Denis expects to be ready to start tomorrow or the next day."

"Start for where?" Brian wanted to know.

"This I cannot tell you, because I have not been told myself."

"I see. Well, I'm ready at any time."

"Good. And now I must go. My time is not my own."

Brian had a poor appetite for lunch, and was already finished when he was called to the phone. When he said, "Hello," a voice snapped, "Is that Brian Merrick?"

"Yes, Sir Denis."

"Didn't recognize you for a moment. What's up? Something gone wrong?"

"Not exactly. That is, nothing that concerns you personally. But Zoe Montero left in a tremendous hurry yesterday. Called me from the railroad station, or so she said, and seemed very agitated. Told me her aunt in Luxor was dying. I'm rather worried, Sir Denis. I have a hunch something queer may be going on. A man I'm almost sure was a spy was eavesdropping on us while we were having lunch at Mena House. Could you give me her uncle's address and phone number?"

"I hope your hunch is wrong, Merrick. Don't want that poor kid dragged into our troubles. Situation's rather complicated. Friend of the Sherif Mohammed happened to be leaving for Luxor the day I got in. Asked him to let Zoe's uncle know I was in Cairo. Safe man, Merrick; name of Jansen, Swedish artist. Jansen wired me Zoe was here."

"But what's his phone number?"

"That's the snag, Merrick. Doubt if he has one. Runs a sort of art shop near the Palace Hotel. Never knew the address. Does reproductions of

murals from the old temples, statuettes of gods, and so on. Sir Lionel Barton employed him when he was excavating a tomb up there.”

“Well, how am I to contact him? Would a radiogram to the Palace Hotel find him?”

“It might, Merrick—in time. I can suggest nothing better. I’ll be sorry if anything happens to Isobel Jansen. I know Jansen is devoted to her. By the way, stand by tomorrow. I’m breaking cover. Look out for me.”

Nayland Smith hung up. Brian rather resented the light dismissal of his concern for Zoe, but reflected that Sir Denis had affairs more serious on his mind than the erratic movements of a girl he evidently thought of as a child. He wrote out a careful message addressed to Mr. Jansen, artist (he didn’t know his first name), at the Luxor Palace, and gave it to the operator for transmission.

But, try as he would to fight it off, a mood of black depression swept down upon him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DR. FU MANCHU sat behind his desk, his disconcerting eyes focused upon Mr. Ahmad.

“You have instructed our agent at Luxor?”

“In detail, Excellency. The situation is under control.”

“Good. Return to your duties.” He resumed his reading of a closely written manuscript.

Ahmad had not long gone out by one door when the Sherîf Mohammed came in at another. “A messenger from China has just arrived, Excellency.”

Dr. Fu Manchu glanced up. “What has he to report?”

“There have been serious disturbances in three provinces. The Communist authorities have been compelled to send military reinforcements to—”

Fu Manchu suddenly stood up. His eyes blazed as though fires burned behind their greenness. “What folly is this. Are our Si-Fan directives no longer obeyed? My orders were clear: Accept whatever conditions are imposed upon you, however harsh. Lull the enemy into a state of false security. Wait! Wait for my word! Then—but not until then—strike, all my millions together. And at last China, our China, will lie like a choice pearl in my hand!” Fu Manchu spoke as a man inspired—or possessed.

The Sherîf Mohammed lowered his head. “It is true, Excellency. But agents of our enemy are sent among them to stir up rebellion, as an excuse for massacre. Here in Egypt also I have great difficulty in preventing premature action.”

Dr. Fu Manchu clenched his long, slender hands and sat down again. From some spot high above his head, Peko, his pet marmoset, sprang down onto his shoulder, giving his curious cry, which sounded like a short whistle. Fu Manchu reached up and stroked the little creature.

“Ah, Peko! You come to soothe me, my tiny friend.”

“No doubt,” Mohammed murmured, “Excellency will wish to send further orders back to General Huan Tsung-chao?”

Fu Manchu nodded. “Let the messenger wait. The fate of all the world hangs now upon a silk thread. Communism is not ready for war, and has

nothing to gain by it. Washington fails to see how one step in the wrong direction may force the hazard. I have been selected to prevent this catastrophe, since I alone could hope to carry out the plan. Upon my success everything depends. Be good enough, my friend, to ask Dr. Matsukata to come in.”

The Sherîf Mohammed salaamed and went out, leaving Dr. Fu Manchu playfully teasing the marmoset, which sometimes tried to bite him, whistling with fury, and sometimes snuggled up against his silk robe affectionately.

Matsukata came in and bowed ceremoniously.

“No later than forty-eight hours from now, Matsukata, we must be on our way. You are ready?”

“I am ready.”

“And your last patient?”

“Is ready also.”

“You are satisfied?”

“He is sleeping. But Excellency might wish to see him.”

Fu Manchu slightly shook his head. “It is unnecessary. He must make the journey. Your papers are in order and your accommodations secured. You should rejoin me not later than twenty-four hours after I arrive.”

Matsukata bowed again. The marmoset sprang across the desk and whistled at him angrily.

Brian spent a wretched day. He remained extremely uneasy about Zoe. Whatever the urgency, he couldn't understand why she had gone without telling him where he could get in touch with her. He had found out from the hotel management that she had left all her luggage behind and all her expensive dresses.

It was late in the afternoon when a boy handed him a telegram. It was signed “J. Jansen.” The message was brief, merely stating that Zoe had hurried back to Luxor with him and that there was hope after all for her aunt's recovery. She sent her love to Brian and Sir Denis.

Brian gave a great sigh of relief. He had built up a pyramid of doubts based upon her disappearance. These included the theory that Mr. Ahmad was a traitor in Sir Denis' camp; that Sir Denis was losing his grip and didn't recognize friend from enemy. The telegram shattered these delusions, lifting a dreadful load from his mind.

During the remainder of the afternoon he wrote a long letter to Zoe, addressed in care of J. Jansen. When he went down to dinner Sir Denis had not yet appeared.

He was about to go out onto the terrace for coffee when he saw Nayland Smith hurrying in his direction, accompanied by another man, quite unmistakably English. Both wore evening dress.

“Ah, there you are, Merrick,” Sir Denis snapped. “Want you to meet Sir Nigel Richardson from the Embassy.”

“How do you do, Mr. Merrick?” Sir Nigel shook hands cordially. “Devil of a game you fellows have taken on. Sir Denis has been telling me all about it.”

Brian felt quite confused. “Will you join me for coffee?”

“Came to fetch you,” Sir Nigel explained. “You’re coming back to the Embassy for your coffee and so forth. Business to be done! Lots of work. Very little time.”

Brian found an Embassy car waiting outside, and a few minutes later found himself in Sir Nigel Richardson’s study. Coffee was passed around, and an assortment of liqueurs. A young attaché, Captain Arkwright, joined the party and made notes from time to time. He was earnest, efficient, and highly excited.

“Please give my regards to your father, Mr. Merrick.” Sir Nigel raised his glass to Brian. “He was with the American Legation in Madrid some years ago, when I also was posted to Spain. We were much younger then.” He smiled, glanced at Nayland Smith. “You were a policeman in Burma in those days, Denis.”

“That’s where I first crossed the path of Dr. Fu Manchu.” Sir Denis stood up and began to move about restlessly, filling his pipe, which he rarely forgot to bring along, as Brian recalled. “And he’s a bigger menace today than he was then.”

Sir Nigel Richardson frowned thoughtfully, drawing together, his heavy eyebrows, black in contrast with his silvered hair.

“Your sudden appearance has set me thinking, Denis. Rumors of this man’s doings, nothing further, have come my way in spots as far apart as Teheran and Paris. What should you guess his age to have been the first time you saw him?”

“I should have taken him for seventy—well preserved, but about seventy.”

Sir Nigel stared, watching Nayland Smith light his pipe. “Then, for heaven’s sake, if he’s really still alive—”

“I know,” Smith snapped. “He’s over a hundred. I have believed for a long time that he has mastered the secret of prolonging life. He’s a scientific

genius. But unless he's also a Chinese edition of the Wandering Jew, I'll finish him one day."

"He has certainly proved hard to finish," Sir Nigel commented dryly.

And as Nayland Smith grinned in rather a grim way, Brian noted a faint mark like a wrinkle appear on the bridge of his nose, and realized for the first time that the plaster had been removed.

"If I fail to get him this time, Nigel, it'll be because he's finished *me!* And now, to the job. As you know, my passport, as well as everything else I had with me, is lost."

"A new diplomatic passport is ready, Denis." Sir Nigel glanced at the attaché. "You have it there, Arkwright?"

"Here, sir." The passport was laid on a coffee table.

"Transport?" Sir Denis asked.

"A plane manned by Royal Air Force personnel will be at your disposal."

"And Mr. Merrick?"

"I have made an appointment for him to meet Mr. Lyman Bostock, my United States opposite number, at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Take your own passport along, Mr. Merrick. It will be exchanged for one giving you diplomatic privilege."

Brian's head began to swim. He didn't know if this was due to Sir Nigel's old Napoleon brandy or to the miraculous speed with which Nayland Smith got things done.

"And the third passenger?"

Sir Nigel lighted another cigar. "That matter I had to pass to Bostock. He has promised me that a passport with a suitable visa will be issued by the United States Consulate and ready for Mr. Merrick to pick up in the morning when he calls for his own."

When the Embassy car took them back, Nayland Smith got out at the hotel entrance and dismissed the chauffeur.

"To take that official chariot through the Mûski tonight, Merrick, would be calculated to start a riot. The bar's still open. I'm thirsty. Let's have a drink and then I'll get a cab."

Brian thought, as they sat down at a corner table, that Sir Denis looked oddly drawn and very tired. "I'd say you'd had one hell of a time," he told him sympathetically.

"Why? Do I look chewed up?"

“Not at all, Sir Denis! In fact, though I don’t know the details, I consider you’ve made an amazing comeback.”

Nayland Smith smiled. But even now it wasn’t the happy smile that Brian seemed to remember. Undoubtedly he had suffered more than he cared to admit.

“I suppose I look as well as I can expect to look.” He took a long drink. “By the way, Merrick, have you had any news from Luxor?”

Brian told him about the message from Mr. Jansen.

“That’s good.” Nayland Smith glanced at his watch. “Time I was moving. Don’t waste regrets on Zoe, Merrick. She’s a charming girl, but her mother was an Arab. These people are unpredictable, you know. Like snow upon the desert and so forth. Don’t be late in the morning.” He jumped up. “We must be ready to leave at any hour tomorrow.”

Brian stood up too. “But where are we going?”

“New York. Good night, Merrick.”

Lyman Bostock turned out to be another friend of Senator Merrick, as Brian discovered when he presented himself at Mr. Bostock’s office at ten o’clock.

“You might be your father as I remember him at Harvard,” Mr. Bostock declared. “I suppose he got you this appointment as aide to Sir Denis Nayland Smith?”

“No, sir, he didn’t. I got it myself—just by accident.”

“Is that so?” Mr. Bostock, with his smooth white hair and fresh complexion and soft Southern voice, had a gentle manner that made Brian wonder what he was doing in such a smoldering volcano as Cairo. “I naturally supposed, as Sir Denis is acting for Washington, by arrangement with London, that your father had proposed you. You will find your duties exciting.”

“I’ve found them exciting already.” Brian laid his passport on the desk.

“This is your new passport.” Mr. Bostock passed it across. “When your present employment ends, you may be asked to return it, in which case your old one will be returned to you. I’m sending it to Washington. And now”—he opened an envelope—“here are Dr. Hessian’s papers.” He looked up. His mild blue eyes twinkled. “Rather irregularly, I confess, he is being admitted to the United States under the quota system. And here is Dr. Hessian’s passport.”

When Brian, back in his room, had put the neat little diplomatic passport in an inside pocket and locked the other documents in a suitcase, he went downstairs and out into the garden. He was still lingering there, wondering how soon they were to start for New York, when a boy came up with a radiogram. Brian tore it open and felt his heart give a queer little jump.

It was from Lola Erskine:

“I wonder if you realize you left no address. Only just found out through Thomas Cook where you are. Please reply how long staying in Cairo. Love. Lola.”

Brian felt suddenly on top of the rainbow. What a multiple idiot he had been! Waiting day after day for a word from Lola, and except for telling her that he was flying to Cairo, he had given her no idea where to reach him! But she found a way. He seemed to be looking again into those gray eyes with their hint of hidden laughter, hearing her voice. And he knew, in this moment, that Zoe had been a distraction, no more. He hoped, as Nayland Smith had encouraged him to believe, that Zoe felt the same way about it.

He suddenly decided to make a dash to the Mûski and order five hundred Azîza cigarettes to be sent by air to Lola in London. He knew that she liked Egyptian cigarettes.

Without allowing himself time to change his mind, he went out, jumped in a cab, and told the driver to take him to the shop of Achmed es-Salah in the Khân Khalîl. He had good reason to distrust Achmed, but he sold excellent cigarettes. This done, he would at least have time to send a radiogram to Lola before he left Cairo.

And so presently he found himself again passing through those crowded, colorful, dusty streets, listening to cries musical and discordant, the vehicle sometimes nearly running over a tiny donkey and always meeting with some sort of obstruction.

Achmed sat smoking in the entrance to his cavernous shop. Brian looked hard into the shadows beyond. But today he found no amber eyes watching him.

“Ah, my gentleman!” Achmed greeted him. “You come for my cigarettes. Is it so?”

“It is so. You can mail some to London?”

“Of course. I send many to England, and also to America.”

Brian ordered five hundred Azîzas to be sent to Lola, writing the address on a little card that Achmed gave him. He paid the price demanded, which he knew was exorbitant, and a small sum for postage; then he hurried away. He had kept the cab waiting.

The driver had gone no more than a few hundred yards when he upset and narrowly avoided running over a very large man riding a very small donkey. The language of the fallen rider, which Brian didn't understand, was evidently so ornamental, even for an Arab, that a laughing crowd gathered around him. They ignored the driver's warnings and encouraged the furious victim to further abuse.

A car going in the opposite direction, its Nubian chauffeur tooting remorselessly, forced a way through the outskirts of the audience and passed on. Brian had a glimpse of the solitary passenger.

It was Mr. Ahmad.

These suspicions concerning this man, never far from his mind, awoke again. Was Ahmad going to the shop that he himself had just left? Even so, he might be going only to buy cigarettes. But Brian reviewed the chain of events that linked old Achmed with the girl who had followed him, and joined up with that ragged beggar who had undoubtedly been waiting for him outside the building that accommodated the Aziza Cigarette Company.

He wondered if he should speak to Nayland Smith about it, but hesitated for fear of giving Sir Denis the impression that he was inclined to form wild theories that lacked any basis in proven fact.

A time was to come when he would regain confidence in his instincts. But that time was not yet.

The call came just after two o'clock. Brian had dispatched a radiogram to Lola and was crossing the lobby when Nayland Smith burst in.

"Baggage down, Merrick? Got the passports and entry papers? Good. Everything will be settled up here. We're off!"

Sir Nigel Richardson's chauffeur was standing outside to dispose of Brian's luggage in the big Embassy car. Four motorcycle police were lined alongside and a number of spectators had gathered, curious to get a glimpse of the distinguished visitor. They probably expected to see a Hollywood celebrity, and were plainly disappointed when Brian and Sir Denis came out and got into the car.

Brian found another passenger inside, a tall, stooping man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and dark sun glasses, his chin buried in the upturned collar of his light topcoat. As the car swept smoothly away with its escort Nayland Smith said in his jerky fashion, "Merrick, I want you to meet our fellow traveler, Dr. Otto Hessian. This is Mr. Brian Merrick, Junior, Doctor."

The Doctor nodded slightly.

During the drive out to the airport Dr. Hessian never spoke a word, and rarely moved. Sir Denis, in a low voice, explained the situation to Brian:

“Dr. Hessian has been under medical care since I smuggled him into Cairo. He was in even worse shape than I was. But he went ahead with his work. We had to leave all his apparatus behind, of course. Smashed it. But the man has a majestic brain. Memorized every detail. The whole thing is ready again, in blueprint, for setting up directly we reach New York.”

“That’s a wonderful job, Sir Denis.”

“He’s a wonderful man. Doesn’t know much English, but does know loads of science. We’re not sure if the enemy has traced him here. Hence the precautions. Once we’re airborne our troubles are over. Detailed instructions have been sent ahead in code. Hessian expects to find all the necessary equipment on hand when we get there.”

A surprise awaited Brian when they arrived at the airport.

Sir Nigel Richardson and Captain Arkwright were waiting to see them off . . . and they were talking to Mr. Ahmad.

Mr. Bostock came up while Dr. Hessian was being presented. He shook hands with the Doctor and made some complimentary remarks in German. Dr. Hessian nodded and hurried aboard the plane. He was clearly a man so completely wrapped up in his own studies that he had neither time nor inclination for the social amenities. Nayland Smith drew Brian aside with Ahmad.

“I thought, Merrick, there might be some last-minute commissions to carry out. Mr. Ahmad is at your service. He will see to it that any correspondence that may arrive for you after we leave will be forwarded to New York.”

“Thanks very much.” Brian found himself forced once more to reconsider his views of Mr. Ahmad. “I don’t expect anything, though. And I can think of nothing else.”

“If you do, Mr. Merrick”—Ahmad gave his glittering smile—“don’t hesitate to notify me, at any time.”

Five minutes later the plane took off on the first leg of its long journey.

CHAPTER NINE

BRIAN stared from a window of the suite in the Babylon-Lido Hotel that he shared with Nayland Smith. Sir Denis, he knew, had been retained by Washington, and certainly they had done him royally in the matter of accommodations. Their suite was on the top floor, and from where he stood the view stretched south to the Empire State Building and west to the Palisades. There was a penthouse apartment on the roof above them, occupied by Dr. Hessian. One room, he understood, was equipped as a laboratory.

Throughout the journey from Cairo he had never succeeded in getting a single word out of the distinguished physicist, nor had the Doctor once removed his dark glasses in his presence.

Brian had no excuse to complain about his living quarters, and his salary was princely. All the same, he wasn't happy. From the hour when he had signed on in London for this strange job up to the present moment, he had been called upon to do exactly nothing.

Only that morning he had tackled Nayland Smith on the subject, and Nayland Smith had replied, "Cultivate patience, Merrick. There are long spells of idleness in a soldier's life, too. But when war starts he has his hands full. We're in just that position. I might have had desperate need of you in Cairo. As it chanced, I didn't. We got Hessian away without a hitch. But Dr. Fu Manchu's forces are here, too—a group of thugs pledged to stop Hessian's work. How they'll operate I don't know. I can't tell you if I'll need your brawn or your brain. But I can assure you that you'll be an essential figure in the picture. This is by far the biggest thing I ever took on, and if it breaks me and Fu Manchu wins, it means the end of all we stand for."

Before he went out that morning, Sir Denis drew Brian's attention to a portable phone in the living room. It was connected with the penthouse above.

"By arrangement with the management, Merrick, the elevator goes no higher than this floor. Visitors to the penthouse must use the stairs. But the door is locked from the inside. You'll see a typed notice on it: 'Apply Apartment Twenty-six-ten.' That's this apartment. If anyone applies, take

particulars and call Dr. Hessian. His secretary will answer. She's a young lady supplied by the FBI."

And so Brian realized that whenever Nayland Smith was out, he had to stay in. He was on a kind of sentry duty.

Many hours had passed since then, but no one had applied for permission to visit Dr. Hessian. He had ordered his lunch sent up and written a long letter to Senator Merrick, walked along the corridor, and dropped it in the letter chute.

As he returned, he had an odd impression that the door to the penthouse stairs had been slightly opened, that someone had looked out and then quickly drawn back. Before going in to the suite, he stood for a moment looking at the mysterious door. He could see a sheet of paper pinned to it, and beyond doubt the door was closed. He concluded that he had been mistaken.

And now he had nothing to do but stare out of a window.

He was watching smoke from a ship steaming up the river when the penthouse phone buzzed. He picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Nayland Smith here," came the snappy voice. "Any visitors?"

"No."

"Callers?"

"No one called."

"Boring for you, Merrick. Relax for a couple of hours. I'll take over. Cut downstairs and try a champagne cocktail in the Paris Bar. They used to be good when I was here before. Then dine in the Silver Grill. I shall know where to find you if you're wanted."

"Thanks, Sir Denis. I'll take your advice."

He looked at his watch, surprised to find how late it was. He spruced up and went downstairs. Although he wasn't familiar with the Babylon-Lido, he had no difficulty in finding the Paris Bar. It was decorated in Montmartre style, with colored advertisements for French drinks on the walls, and framed Lautrec reproductions. There were red-and-white checked cloths on the little tables, French waiters, and a French bartender.

The bar was already well patronized, but he saw no one he knew. He sat down at a vacant table and ordered a Martini, smiling to himself at Nayland Smith's recommendation of a champagne cocktail. He supposed he should be grateful to find himself back in his native land, but all the same a voice within kept asking: Why New York? Why couldn't it be London? When his

drink came and he had sampled it and lighted a cigarette he began to feel better. He recalled what someone had told him once, that Secret Service routine can be as dull as banking.

This thought consoled him, and he had just ordered a second cocktail when soft hands were pressed over his eyes from behind and a soft voice said, "Guess, Brian! Who is it?"

He grasped the slender hands, twisted in his chair, and found himself looking up into eyes that smiled while they seemed to mock him.

"Lola!" He almost failed to recognize his own voice. "But—but you ought to be in London!"

Lola freed her hands, stepped around, and sat down in the chair facing him. "You mean I shouldn't be in New York?"

"My dear!" Brian partly recovered from the happy shock. "Your being here is the answer to a prayer. It's impossible but true."

"Did you get my radiogram?"

"I did. But did you get my reply?"

Lola shook her head. A waiter was standing beside her. Brian ordered two Martinis. As the waiter moved away Lola said, "How could I? I had to leave London an hour after I sent my message to you in Cairo. Madame had booked me for a flight leaving the same afternoon. I told you, Brian, we'd meet again before long."

Brian's eyes devoured her. As always, Lola was perfectly dressed, with that deceptive simplicity which only much money can buy.

"Are you staying here—in the Babylon-Lido?"

"Yes. Madame believes in Michel representatives being seen in smart places."

"Lola, it's a miracle!"

Lola, watching him, smiled that odd smile which at once irritated and infatuated him. "There are men even today, Brian, who can perform miracles."

Her words were puzzling; but, as the waiter brought the cocktails, he forgot them, clinked glasses, and was glad to be alive.

"You didn't know I was here, Lola?"

"How could I? I saw you as I came in."

"Are you free for dinner?"

"Of course, Brian dear. I only just arrived."

Dr. Fu Manchu sat in a small room that apparently had no windows. A single bright light shone down onto a large-scale plan pinned to a board, so that sometimes the shadow of his head or hand would appear on the plan as he bent forward to study it. The room was profoundly silent.

The plan represented a number of suites of apartments, some adjoining one another, but roughly half of them separated from the others by a wide corridor. An elevator door and a stairway were marked, both opening off a square landing.

It was a plan of the top floor of a wing of the Babylon-Lido.

Of the three suites shown on the west side of the corridor the one in the center was marked 2610; 2611 was on the north of it and 2609 on the south. There were four smaller apartments on the east side, numbered from 2612 to 2615.

Dr. Fu Manchu took a pinch of snuff from a silver box, then turned his shadowed face toward a cabinet that stood near. He pressed a switch.

“Connect Twenty-six-eleven.”

An interval, and then a man’s voice speaking English with a pronounced accent: “Twenty-six-eleven.”

“You are unpacked and established?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Your transmitter is well concealed?”

“Yes, Master.”

“You may not be wanted tonight, but remain in the hotel.”

A faint click and the order: “Connect twenty-six-o-nine.”

There was an almost instant answer, in such bad English as to be nearly unintelligible.

“Speak in your own language. You are ready?”

The reply came in Burmese: “I am ready, Master.”

“Remain where you are until further orders.”

The four apartments on the east side were connected one after another; orders were given and accepted in a variety of tongues. Dr. Fu Manchu was a phenomenal linguist. At last he was satisfied. He leaned back in his chair and hissed softly between his teeth.

Suite 2610, occupied by Sir Denis Nayland Smith, was entirely surrounded by agents of Fu Manchu.

While Brian waited for Lola to join him in the Silver Grill, his reflections took an odd turn. There was a queer similarity between this meeting with Lola in New York and his meeting with Zoe in Cairo. They might both have been planned by a producer too lazy to alter the routine. Brian laughed silently, and wondered why so grotesque an idea had occurred to him as he saw Lola coming.

She had changed into an unpretentious but charming dinner dress. It might have—and had—been designed expressly to set off her particular type of beauty. She looked radiant and attracted the tribute of many frowns from the women present.

When they had ordered their dinner, and Lola had selected the right Bordeaux to go with it, she said, “I’m simply dying to hear what you’re doing in New York, Brian. I thought your mysterious affairs were connected with the East, not the West.”

“So did I,” Brian admitted. Then he stopped.

How much was he entitled to tell Lola? She knew some of the facts already, but only as little as he had known himself up to the time of his departure from London.

“New York was the last place I expected to find myself in.” Lola delicately nibbled an olive. “You were the last person I expected to meet.”

Brian went through the pangs of an inward struggle. He longed to confide in *somebody*. He was made that way. If he couldn’t trust Lola, in whom could he put his trust? After all, she knew already that he was employed by Nayland Smith, and even if he told her all he knew of Sir Denis’ plans, it didn’t add up to much. For he recognized, with a return of his sense of frustration, that he had been kept in the dark all along. He imposed only one condition upon himself: He must say nothing about either Hessian or Dr. Fu Manchu.

“If I could make you understand, Lola, how mad I was to learn that we were coming to New York when the only place I wanted to be was London, you’d know how I longed to be with you again. Finding you right here made me think I had Aladdin’s lamp in my pocket and didn’t know it!”

“I was just as delighted to see *you*, Brian. Your last letter—the one you left for me—made me rather sad. Perhaps you were just mad at having to leave so suddenly. But it was a very chilly letter, Brian.”

Brian’s sense of guilt dried up his speech for a moment. Then he forced a grin and squeezed Lola’s hand.

“I’m no good at writing that kind of letter,” he told her lamely. “I can say what I want to say, but I can’t write it.”

“You can’t,” she agreed, but the gray eyes were dancing with mischief. “Maybe it’s just as well. You might be prosecuted for libel.”

A waiter came to serve the first course, and when he had gone Lola asked, “What did you do in Cairo? Any perilous adventures, either male or female?”

“Nothing much.” Brian spoke hastily. “Except that I was tailed everywhere I went.”

“Tailed? By whom? What for?”

“Because they knew I was with Nayland Smith, I suppose.”

Lola buttered a roll. “Who are ‘they,’ Brian? I don’t understand.”

“Well . . . from all I can make out, Lola, it’s a Communist plot Sir Denis is up against.”

“How exciting! What’s the plot?”

“Even if I knew—and I don’t—I couldn’t tell you.”

“It must be something to do with this country, Brian. Is Sir Denis with you?”

“Sure. He’s right here, in the Babylon-Lido.”

“But Brian, dear, you must know what he’s here for. Is he looking for somebody?”

Brian realized that he was on perilously thin ice. Secret agents were expected to keep their secrets from *everybody*.

“Let me make one thing plain, Lola. I’m not in on the master plan. I get my orders from the chief and ask no questions. All I know is that it’s something very big.”

During the rest of dinner they talked about London and the happy days they had spent there. Every minute Brian knew more and more how much Lola meant to him. She was in an entirely different category from that of the alluring Arab girl Zoe. He had always known it, but tonight his last doubt left him. He was sincerely in love with Lola.

A page appeared at his elbow. “Mr. Brian Merrick?”

“Yes.”

“You have a phone call, sir.”

He excused himself and went to a box at the end of the grill room. Even before he heard the voice he knew that this delightful interlude with Lola had come to an end.

“Thought I’d find you there, Merrick,” Sir Denis said. “Don’t bolt your dinner, but come up when you finish.”

Lola knew before he spoke. “Wanted by the chief?” She smiled that slightly one-sided smile which made him want to kiss her, because it was part invitation and part mockery.

“You’ve guessed it, dear. But he was good enough to tell me not to hurry.”

“In the case of Madame Baudin—that’s Mrs. Michel—that would mean twenty minutes. But never mind. There’s all my packing to do, and we have lots of time ahead.”

Brian found Nayland Smith pacing up and down their large living room. The air was foggy with tobacco smoke. He turned as Brian came in and spoke without taking his pipe out of his mouth.

“News for you, Merrick. Your father’s coming tomorrow.”

“That’s fine! I mailed a letter to him only this afternoon.”

“The Senator is bringing some brass hat from the Air Force. But they’ll both be disappointed if they expect to see Dr. Hessian. He refuses to receive any visitors until his model is ready for a demonstration.”

“Why is the Air Force interested?” Brian wanted to know.

“Because Hessian claims that his invention will put ’em out of business.”

“What? That doesn’t make sense, Sir Denis.”

“Think not?” Nayland Smith shot a quick glance at him. “You’re going to be surprised.”

“What is it? A guided missile?”

“No. Something to make guided missiles a waste of time. I’m not a physicist, Merrick, so I can’t explain the thing, but it means immunity from every form of air attack, including H bombs.”

“Good Lord! But can he really do it?”

Nayland Smith stared at Brian with a grim smile. “Why do you suppose I risked my neck to get him here?”

It was a sound argument in its way. Brian said, “I begin to see some reason for all the precautions.”

“Particularly now that Dr. Fu Manchu has traced him.”

“I still don’t understand where Dr. Fu Manchu comes in.”

“Then I’ll explain. I was retained by the United States government to get Hessian out of the hands of the Communists, to enable him to use his

phenomenal brain for the side he belongs to. Dr. Fu Manchu has been retained by the Communists to see that he doesn't do it."

Brian was reduced to stupefied silence for a moment. He remembered saying to Lola, "All I know is that it's something very big." How big he hadn't dreamed. Nayland Smith went on pacing about like a caged animal.

"Can you tell me one thing more, Sir Denis?" Brian ventured. "If you're sure that agents of Dr. Fu Manchu are actually in New York, why don't you have them arrested?"

Sir Denis turned, fixed him with a penetrating stare. "Have you any idea, Merrick, how long I tried to trap Fu Manchu himself during the time I knew, as all Scotland Yard knew, that he was in London? Six years! And he's still free. As for his unidentified agents, New York is an even tougher problem than London." He knocked ashes from his pipe into a tray. "Dr. Fu Manchu is president of an organization known as the Si-Fan. It has members throughout the East, Near and Far. It has agents in every city in Europe and every city in the United States. Its power is second only to that of communism, if not equal to it."

He began to stuff a coarse-cut mixture into the hot bowl of his pipe. Brian said nothing.

"Its greatest strength, Merrick, is in its secrecy. Few people have even heard of the Si-Fan. As a result, there's never been any concerted action against it. If they can't have Hessian's invention themselves, the Reds don't intend to let anyone else have it. Heaven knows what they'll try. But it's our job to guard Hessian until he passes his plans over to the United States."

CHAPTER TEN

IN EGYPT, not long afterward, on a night when there was no moon over Cairo, something happened designed to have an important bearing upon affairs in New York.

A small, lean man, very dark-skinned, was discarding his cloak upon the doorstep of the house in which Brian had once taken shelter from the student rioters. When he stepped out onto the narrow street he wore only a black loincloth and a small, tightly wound black turban.

The quarter had sunk into silence. Except for the distant sound of a pipe and the barely audible thud of a drum, nothing disturbed its stillness. The little man glanced once to right and left, then crossed the narrow street to the gate of the courtyard opposite. He peered through the bars. He could see the house of the Sherif Mohammed, its projecting windows outlined against the starlight. The windows were dark. Nothing stirred.

He clasped the metal bars with bare toes and fingers, and with the agility of a monkey climbed to the top. He dropped lightly on the other side, moved across the courtyard, and surveyed the front of the building. Hesitating for a moment, he ran to the end. Looking up, he saw what he wanted.

A sturdy bougainvillea covered the south wall. On the floor above were several windows. He mounted to the first of these at incredible speed, but found it securely fastened. He swung to another. It was slightly open. He held his ear against the narrow opening, listening intently. Then inch by inch, he raised the window and dropped noiselessly inside the room.

Motionless, he lay where he had dropped. There was no sound. From his loincloth he pulled out a small flashlight. He lighted it for a moment. He was looking for the door. He found it.

In a matter of seconds he was out on a tiled corridor. Again he stood still, listening. He moved to the left, attracted by a sound of snoring. He peered into an anteroom richly furnished. It had a large window and the starlight was strong enough to enable this strangely endowed visitor to see all he wanted to see.

A fat man lay asleep on a cushioned divan—the man who had first come to the gate when Brian called to demand an interview with the Sherif Mohammed.

The keen eyes of the little dark man detected a doorway on the right of the anteroom. He crossed to it, went through, and found a descending stair. It led to another corridor.

After cautiously opening several doors, he found what he was looking for: another stairway. He went down at extraordinary speed for one running in the dark, and found himself in the paved entrance hall of the house.

Now that his eyes were accustomed to the dim light, he could evidently see as clearly as a cat. And he seemed to know just what he was looking for.

With complete assurance, and making no sound, he moved around the walls, and presently, near the door that opened on the courtyard, he found what he sought. At the back of a small room intended for a porter's lodge there was a strong teak door, iron-studded, the wood bleached with age. A bunch of old-fashioned Arab keys hung on a hook beside it. The largest of these fitted the ancient lock.

A stone stair led the midnight intruder to the cellars. Here he used his flashlight without hesitation. He found stores of various kinds, including casks of wine that no true believer would expect to find in the cellars of a descendant of the Prophet.

Pressing on farther, he came to a smaller cellar, long and narrow. There was nothing in it, but on one side were two more of the heavy iron-studded teak doors. They differed from that at the top of the stair in one respect: Each had an iron grille in it. He had thrust the bunch of keys inside his accommodating loincloth; he was about to pull them out when he stopped dead, as if stricken motionless—a trick of many wild animals when surprised.

Quite still he stood, and listened.

The sound was very faint, but this man's senses were supernatural. Someone was sleeping behind one of the doors.

He remained still for nearly a minute, debating what he should do. Then he crossed to the grille from behind which the sound came, peered in, could see nothing, and so shone a momentary ray from his flashlight into the blackness.

An instant challenge came. "Who's there?"

The little man switched the light off and glided from the cellar, silent as a phantom. He fled up to the porter's lodge, relocked the door as he had found it, making more noise than he cared to, and went out into the entrance hall.

Here he stood still again to listen. There was no sound.

In niches of the mosaic-covered wall were many rare porcelain pots and other beautiful objects. On some of those the little man shone brief flashes from his light.

He began to examine the several windows facing onto the courtyard, selected one of them, opened it slightly, and slipped through like a lizard. Once outside, he succeeded in partly closing it again.

He was over the gate and across the street to the doorway where he had left his cloak with a silent agility more like that of a nocturnal animal than of any human being.

Mr. Lyman Bostock, United States representative in Cairo, twirled a cigar between finger and thumb and stared reflectively across at Sir Nigel Richardson, his British colleague, who lay in a split-cane lounge chair with an iced drink beside him in the hollow of the chair arm provided for that purpose. Mr. Bostock's study opened onto a balcony, and the balcony overhung a pleasant garden, shadowy on this moonless night.

"I'm only just finding it out," Mr. Bostock remarked in his soothing drawl, "but you're a queer bunch, you Englishmen."

"I happen to be Scotch."

"Maybe that's worse. But I have to hand it to you, there's not much about this country you don't seem to know—including all the crooks in Cairo."

"That's base ingratitude, Bostock! I'll let you in on a secret. Murdoch, whom you've met with me—he has confidential employment in our Embassy—was formerly an officer with the Egyptian police. That was in the days when we ran the show. And what Murdoch doesn't know about the Cairo underworld could be put in a thimble. You asked me to find the right man. I found him."

Mr. Bostock glanced at his watch, took a drink, and put his cigar back in his mouth.

"Agreed. I accept the responsibility."

"You don't have to. We're in this thing together. If your FBI has unearthed a mare's nest—and that's my private opinion—there was no alternative so far as I can see. The course of action was left to you. What could you do? Neither you nor I could get a search warrant on a mere suspicion, particularly in the case of so highly respected a citizen as the Sherif Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf."

"That's true. I could see no alternative to your suggestion, short of declining to act in the matter. But, with apologies to your British gift of understatement, it's slightly illegal."

“Illegal be damned! What do we stand to lose? Let’s examine the facts. Who knows you were asked to make this investigation?”

“Except yourself—”

“And Murdoch. I had to let him in.”

“Nobody but myself and Arkwright, who decoded the message.”

“Good. Let’s look at possible consequences. Suppose Ali gets pinched. It’s unlikely, but he might be. He has a record, not only as a cat burglar, but also for jail-breaking. He’s escaped twice, and they’re still looking for him. To lock up Ali Yahya is about as useful as to try to hold an eel by the tail. He can climb up or down almost anything, slip in and out of incredibly narrow openings. He’s a living legend among the natives, who claim he can make himself invisible. They call him Ali al-Sehlîya—Ali the Lizard.”

“I trust he lives up to it,” Bostock drawled. “But, all the same, suppose he gets . . . ‘pinched,’ I think you said?”

“Pinched was the word. You don’t seriously suggest he would tell the police that he was acting under instructions from the United States Embassy?”

Mr. Bostock stood up and refilled their two glasses. Sir Nigel watched him, grinning mischievously, until he sat down again.

“No,” Bostock admitted, “He’d probably choose to escape a third time and collect the price of his crime that you and I promised to pay.”

“That’s the answer.” Sir Nigel took a long drink. “Nobody knows we have seen him except Murdoch. And Murdoch provided him with a complete plan of the house of the Sherîf Mohammed.”

“Useful man, Murdoch,” Mr. Bostock murmured, looking again at his watch. “Also Scotch, no doubt?”

“Also Scotch.” Then Sir Nigel too consulted his wrist watch. “Ali is about due back.”

“He’s *overdue*.”

Sir Nigel shook his head, smiling. “Think of how far he has to come.”

“Isn’t Murdoch giving him a lift?”

Sir Nigel raised his black brows. “Really, my dear fellow! Do you want Murdoch pinched as well?”

“Meaning that Ali will have to walk here from the Mûski?”

“Ali’s methods of transport are his own secret.”

They fell into silence, each thinking his own thoughts. A faint breeze arose, rustling the palm fronds outside and making a noise like the crackling

of stiff paper. A faint perfume from some night-scented flower in the garden was wafted into the study. A large bat flew past the window.

So they sat when, unheralded by any sound, a small dark figure materialized on the balcony, glided into the room, and performed a humble salaam.

Mr. Bostock nearly dropped a cone of cigar ash on the carpet. Sir Nigel, though equally startled, hailed the apparition in Arabic.

“Good evening, Ali Yahya.”

“Good evening, Richardson Pasha.”

“What have you to report, Ali?”

“It is true, what I was told. Someone is there.”

Mr. Bostock sprang up. “You say someone is there?”

In his excitement he used English instead of Arabic, a language that he understood better than he spoke. Ali Yahya stared blankly. He had discarded his cloak, and he presented a queer figure in that sedately appointed room in his black loincloth and turban. Mr. Bostock corrected himself hastily, and Ali said again:

“Someone is there, effendi.”

Bostock glanced at Sir Nigel. “We must get the exact facts, Richardson. You ask the questions. You’re more fluent than I. Let him sit down. The man must be tired.”

Ali accepted the invitation and dropped down, cross-legged, on the carpet. Then, speaking impassively in simple words, he described what he had found in the Sherîf’s cellar.

“You didn’t see the face of this man?” Sir Nigel asked.

“No. He slept, it seems, like a desert fox, with one eye open. I obeyed my orders and came away quickly.”

“That was wise, Ali. You did well. You relocked all doors?”

“And replaced the keys where I found them.”

“No one saw you leave?”

“No one ever sees me, Richardson Pasha, when I do not wish to be seen.”

From the drawer of a coffee table Sir Nigel took out a wad of notes fastened with an elastic band and tossed it across to Ali, who caught it deftly.

Ali Yahya salaamed so deeply that his forehead touched the carpet. “O Well of Justice!”

He tried to thrust the bundle of money into his loincloth, but had some difficulty in doing so. The “well of justice” was watching him.

“There must be many treasures in the house of the Sherif Mohammed, Ali?”

“It is true. The Seyyid Mohammed is very wealthy, Richardson Pasha.”

“So I believe. Tell me, O Ali, what is that you have concealed?” Ali Yahya produced the little flashlight. “No, no! Something more bulky.”

Ali hesitated for one tremendous moment, his bright eyes flashing sideways to the balcony, then back again to meet the inflexible stare of Sir Nigel.

“I feared you might misjudge my motive, Richardson Pasha. For this reason I said nothing. But it seemed to me, O Wise One, that in case a window that I was unable to close properly might arouse suspicion, it would be prudent to leave evidence to show that a common sneak-thief had entered the house.”

“I see. Show us the evidence.”

With great reluctance Ali the Lizard drew out from his loincloth an object wrapped in a piece of faded silk. He opened the wrapping and held up a small incense burner, most delicately chiseled in pure gold, a museum piece for which collectors would pay a fabulous price.

“Good heavens, Richardson!” Mr. Bostock gasped. “We can’t stand for this. He must hand it over.”

Ali Yahya was rewrapping the treasure. Sir Nigel tried to hide a grin.

“Do you prefer it to be found in Ali’s possession, or in the United States Embassy?”

Mr. Bostock dropped back in his chair with a groan. Ali, obeying a silent signal from Sir Nigel, faced away, disappearing silently over the wall of the balcony. A whispered farewell came out of the darkness:

“May your night be a glad one, O Fountain of Wisdom.”

“We know what we wanted to know,” Mr. Bostock admitted. “But what a price to pay!”

“Forget that, Bostock. Our problem is: What are we going to do now?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“WELL, my boy!” Senator Merrick held Brian at arms’ length, sizing him up with shrewd hazel eyes. “You’re looking fine. If I can believe official dispatches from Cairo and the word of Sir Denis, you’ve helped to pull off something that may well prove to be a turning point in military history.”

Brian felt his cheeks flush. “I had next to nothing to do with it, Dad. All the credit belongs to Sir Denis.”

“So you say, Junior. And I like you none the less for it. But Sir Denis Nayland Smith is a brilliant man, and he wouldn’t have wanted you if he hadn’t had use for you. Dr. Hessian arrives at the psychological moment. If he can prove what he claims, it may be a means of stopping the President from plunging us into war.”

“Just what does that mean, Dad?”

“Well, it’s top secret, but there’s a request to Congress for a declaration of a state of war already drawn up, which only requires his signature. His military advisers favor it. I don’t, and I’m not alone in my opposition. This country, Brian, is dangerously open to air attack with modern missiles. We should step warily.”

Nayland Smith was talking to General Rawlins and another Air Force official, and at this moment he brought them across. Brian had already met both that morning.

“I’m getting into hot water,” Sir Denis declared. “These fighting men tell me they expect orders by this week end that seem to me to mean a shooting war.”

“And to me,” Senator Merrick agreed. “But nothing’s signed yet.”

“It will be signed not later than three days from now.” General Rawlins spoke with calm confidence. “For my part, I doubt the claims of this German scientist, in spite of all we’ve heard—and that’s not much. In the first place, I don’t expect open hostilities to start. In the second place, if they do, the Air Force hasn’t been asleep.”

“The trouble about democracy,” Senator Merrick growled, “is that it speaks with too many voices all at the same time.”

“It’s no good flying off the handle, General,” Nayland Smith snapped, “because Dr. Hessian refuses to see you until his plans are complete. I warned you of this before you left Washington, so don’t blame *me*. He’s a genius, and he’s been through hell. He doesn’t give a damn for you or anybody else. He cursed me in German when I told him you were coming. Luckily, I don’t know much German.”

“But when,” General Rawlins demanded, “will these plans of his be complete?”

“So far as I can make out, within the next two days.”

“When he’ll graciously consent to see us?”

“His proposal is this: As soon as he’s ready to give a demonstration, he will receive a committee of responsible officers, scientists, and policymakers, to be selected by Senator Merrick, acting for the President. To me this seems fair and reasonable.”

“And the President will agree with you,” Senator Merrick declared. “World tension is reaching a peak, and I can assure you of the President’s keen concern. Well. Have I your permission, Sir Denis, to take my son to lunch?”

Out of darkness complete except for one point of green light that might have been the eye of some nocturnal animal, Fu Manchu’s voice spoke:

“It is certain that Brian Merrick, Junior, is ignorant of my purpose?”

A dull, mechanical voice replied: “There is no evidence to the contrary.”

“You have not answered my question.”

“His behavior gives cause for confidence, Excellency.”

“Explain your meaning.”

“He lunched at Senator Merrick’s club.”

“He was closely covered?”

“It was difficult. But an agent of the Order waited upon their table. He was, of course, very attentive.”

“Their conversation?”

“Chiefly concerned Sir Denis Nayland Smith.”

“It was satisfactory?”

“Entirely.”

“And after lunch?”

“Brian Merrick, Junior, saw his father off. The Senator was joined by the two Air Force officers who had lunched with Sir Denis at the Babylon-Lido.”

“Retain all contacts. Report hourly.”

The Si-Fan was watching. . . .

When Brian returned to the suite in the Babylon-Lido, he was in a queer frame of mind. Sir Denis sat writing. Looking up, he nodded.

“Good lunch, Merrick? Don’t think too well of the catering at these university clubs, myself.”

“The lunch was all right. But I didn’t like the waiter.”

Nayland Smith laid his pen down. “Why not? Did he upset your soup?”

Brian grinned, but not happily. “No. He listened to everything I said to my father.”

“Well!” Sir Denis stood up quickly. “So the Reds have agents in the best clubs! I warned you, Merrick. What were you talking about?”

“Well, I tried to keep my father off the topic of Dr. Hessian’s invention. But of course he never suspected that a club servant might be a spy.”

“No. I see the difficulty. You’re pretty sure the man was listening?”

“Dead sure.”

Nayland Smith began to walk about in his restless way.

“The climax is so near. And we have two enemies, not one—the Reds and the Si-Fan. It’s a formidable combination, Merrick. I’m backed by two governments, but I doubt if my double backing’s as good as Dr. Fu Manchu’s. We’ve worked like beavers to keep Hessian’s presence here a secret. We have failed.”

Brian thought for a minute. “It seems to me that it wasn’t to be expected we could do that, Sir Denis. As I see it, all we have to do is make sure he’s safe. And on that point I have something to say.”

Nayland Smith darted one of his swift glances at Brian.

“What is it?” he snapped.

“Sometimes when I’ve been alone here, I’ve heard someone being admitted through the penthouse door. And I hear all sorts of footsteps overhead. If this suite is supposed to be a sort of guardroom, and we’re responsible for Dr. Hessian’s safety, shouldn’t we be advised of who is being allowed to go up?”

Nayland Smith knocked out his pipe, then produced the old pouch. He began to stuff tobacco into the cracked brier bowl.

“A good point,” he said. “We are responsible. But the FBI operative attached to Hessian has authority to admit visitors whose identity we don’t know. I’m not disputing his integrity. Fact remains, responsibility is ours. I’ll see to this, Merrick. You’re right.” Sir Denis lit his pipe and walked out.

But when he had gone, Brian remained uncomfortably ill at ease. Up to the time of their arrival at the Babylon-Lido, Nayland Smith had seemed to be firmly in charge of operations. Now something was lacking.

Had his phenomenal success in smuggling the German scientist through the Iron Curtain, in getting him from Cairo to New York, induced Sir Denis to relax too soon? It didn’t seem to fit in with the man’s dynamic character. Surely, now was the crucial hour—in fact, he had said so. What was wrong?

In his very bones, Brian had a foreboding that something was pending that he didn’t understand. He was conscious of a longing to talk it all over with some reliable and sympathetic friend, someone he could trust.

Lola was both reliable and sympathetic . . . but he was bound to secrecy.

Brian walked about for some time in an unhappy frame of mind; he smoked countless cigarettes. Once, hearing faint footsteps that seemed to pause at the far end of the corridor, he crossed the foyer and quietly opened the door.

He was just in time to see the door to the penthouse stairs closing.

“Damn!” he muttered. He had caught not even a glimpse of the person who had gone in.

Listening intently, he detected the unmistakable click of a key being turned in a lock.

This irritated him unreasonably. His job, so far as he could see, remained that of an attendant, a sort of paid companion for Nayland Smith. Plots and counterplots involving the security of the United States seethed around him, but he had no part to play. Never once had he entered the penthouse since Dr. Hessian had taken up residence there, nor had he set eyes upon him from the time of their arrival to the present moment.

The phone on the big desk rang.

“Hullo!” he called.

“Oh, Brian, I’m so glad I caught you!” It was Lola. “When do you expect to be free? I can be in the Paris Bar around cocktail time. Any hope?”

“Where are you now, Lola?”

“At Michel’s. But for mercy’s sake, don’t call me back here. I’ll wait downstairs until seven, Brian. Do try.”

And she hung up.

Brian glanced at his watch. Five o’clock. Then he stood quite still, listening. French windows that opened on a balcony were partly open, and he could hear voices from above. Someone was talking on the terrace of the penthouse.

He opened the windows fully and stepped out.

A strange voice, alternately guttural and sibilant, spoke slowly, with impressive pauses. Something in the voices touched a chord of memory, but so faintly that no idea of the speaker’s identity was conjured up. It bore a vague resemblance to the rarely heard speech of Dr. Hessian, but the language was neither German nor English. It was a language that Brian knew he had never heard before.

There were occasional replies, monosyllables in the same tongue.

Once, Brian was almost sure, the name Nayland Smith was introduced into the otherwise unintelligible jargon. But he knew he might be mistaken, for if it had in fact been that name, it was so mispronounced as to be barely recognizable.

The conversation ended abruptly. He heard a shuffle of footsteps, and knew that the speakers had gone in.

“You made it, Brian!” Lola stood up to greet him as he hurried into the Paris Bar. “I nearly gave up hope. I’m on my second drink. Did the Big Chief have a heart, after all?”

Brian dropped into a chair facing her. He longed to have her in his arms, but this was not the time. And he felt oddly dispirited.

“When he finally came in, I told him about one or two queer things that had happened, and he said boredom was getting on my nerves and ordered me to forget the job and play a while.”

He looked up at a waiter who had just appeared and ordered two more Martinis.

Lola checked him. “No more for me, Brian. I’ll finish on this one.”

Brian didn’t argue, but when the waiter went off he asked, “Surely you’re through work for the day, Lola?”

“Yes.” She was watching him, smiling. “But I like to stay sober all the same. What were these queer things that happened, Brian?”

“Oh!” He lighted a cigarette. “We seem to have some curious neighbors up above us in the penthouse. I overheard somebody talking a queer sort of

jargon, and I mentioned it to Sir Denis.”

“He probably said that some United Nations representatives lived there?”

“No. He didn’t say that.” Brian tried to draw a cloak of secrecy about himself, but wasn’t quite successful. “For a man on a dangerous mission—or so I understand—he brushed it off very lightly. Between ourselves, there are times when I wonder if Sir Denis is really up to his old form.”

“Please, Brian!” Lola smiled her one-sided smile. “Don’t talk Oxford. After all, you’re still an American.”

Brian grinned almost happily. Lola’s impudent criticism of his occasional traces of English idiom and speech, far from annoying, delighted him. It proved her interest, or so he argued. His drink arrived; he sampled it.

“Maybe I mean he’s getting too old for his job.”

Lola frowned thoughtfully, twirling her glass between sensitive fingers.

“As I haven’t met him, I can’t judge, Brian. But there’s just one thing I’d like to know: The first time you saw him in Cairo, did you think he had changed?”

Brian considered the question. “The first time I saw him was from a rooftop, and he looked the same as ever then. But later—”

“From a *rooftop*! What on earth were you doing on a roof? And where was Nayland Smith?”

Brian outlined the incident that had led him to take refuge on the roof of a house overlooking that of the Sherîf Mohammed, and told her what he had seen from there.

“There was no mistake about it, dear. The way he gripped his pipe, the trick of twitching the lobe of his ear. I knew I was looking at Nayland Smith.”

“How excited you must have been! And after that?”

Brian told her how Nayland Smith had been hiding in the house of the Sherîf Mohammed until he could make contact with the Embassy. It was a fine story, and now that Sir Denis was safe in New York there could be no harm in telling it. He told her how he had demanded an interview with the Sherîf.

“When did you see Nayland Smith again?” Lola asked.

Brian gave her an account of Sir Denis’ secret entrance to his hotel apartment, and equally secret exit.

“Was it then, Brian, when you actually talked to him, that you began to wonder if he had outlived what you call ‘his old form’?”

“Not exactly right then, Lola.”

Brian paused and drained his glass. He had thought of something; and the thing, though perhaps trivial, had staggered him, chiefly because he had never thought of it before.

“Then when, dear?”

“Later, I guess. But—when Sir Denis came to see me he had a strip of surgical plaster on the bridge of his nose.”

“Had he been in a fight?” Lola asked the question jokingly, but her gray eyes weren’t smiling.

“He’d had one hell of a time getting out of the hands of the Reds. But that’s not the point. Something that he didn’t tell me must have happened right there in Cairo. Because, when I saw him pacing around that room, and I saw him clearly, there was no plaster on his nose!”

One of the hourly reports ordered by Dr. Fu Manchu was just coming in. That solitary spark of green light glowed in the darkness.

“Brian Merrick’s complete ignorance of Operation Zero confirmed.”

“He has served his purpose, and could be dispensed with. Henceforward he becomes a possible source of danger. Where is he now?”

“In the Sunset Room.”

“He is covered?”

“Closely, Excellency.”

“What federal operatives are on duty there?”

“Two FBI agents.”

The green light disappeared. And, invisible in the darkness, Dr. Fu Manchu laughed.

In the popular but expensive Sunset Room, high up in the Babylon-Lido, with its celebrated dance band and star-spangled floor show, Brian found himself transported to paradise. With Lola in his arms, he was lost to the world, lifted above all its petty troubles—a man rapturously in love. His frustrations, doubts, and fears had dispersed like mist under the morning sun.

“Are you happy, dearest?” he whispered.

“Very happy, Brian.”

He was silent for a long time, living in a dream.

“I often wonder, Lola, in your wanderings about the world, if you ever met someone else who meant more to you than I do.”

“There’s no one who means more to me than you, Brian. But, like you, dear, I have a job to do. We’re both young enough to enjoy ourselves without spoiling it by getting serious for a while yet.”

Brian drew a long breath, made fragrant by the perfume of her hair. “You mean you’d rather stay with Michel than marry me?”

Lola sighed. “I reminded you once before, Brian dear, that early marriages often don’t work out.”

“But not always.”

“Brian, we’re happy! Maybe we’ll never capture this wonderful thing again. *Please* don’t get serious and spoil it all—not tonight.”

He swallowed, but found enough discretion to respect her wishes. As always, Lola was elusive—and so all the more maddeningly desirable.

He was silent for some time, and then he said, “There’s a man standing over by the door. See him? He seems to be watching us.”

“Which one do you mean, Brian?”

“The tall, dark fellow just lighting a cigarette.”

Lola laughed. “No friend of mine. Maybe he’s the house detective!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

BRIAN returned to the suite earlier than he had intended. Lola had been paged just before the star entertainer appeared, and returned, looking very wretched, to tell him that Madame Baudin had checked in at the Babylon-Lido that night and would remain until her forthcoming fashion show there took place. Madame insisted upon an immediate conference in her apartment.

Brian found Nayland Smith at the desk reading what looked like an official document. As usual, his pipe was going like a factory chimney. A tall, painted Italian screen enclosed the desk, and the limited space around it had the quality of a fog. Sir Denis looked up when Brian came in.

“Hello, Merrick. A rumor reaches me that you were seen in the Sunset Room with a very pretty girl. Don’t apologize! You’ve had a dull time, I know. Glad you can find agreeable company.”

“Thanks, Sir Denis—though I can’t imagine who told you.”

Nayland Smith smiled. But again it wasn’t the happy smile that Brian remembered—a smile that had seemed to sweep the years aside and reveal an eager boy.

“One of the FBI men detailed to keep an eye on you.”

“On *me*? Why?”

Sir Denis tossed the typescript aside and stood up. “Merrick, we’re marked men.” The smile vanished. His face became grim. “If Fu Manchu could trap either of us, it would give him a lever with Washington—and he’d know how to use it. I’ve warned you before. Trust nobody—not even a taxi driver you may pick up outside the hotel.”

“But—” A hot protest burned on Brian’s tongue, for he detested an implication that Lola was suspect. He checked the words. “You suggest that this man would try to hold us?”

“And could succeed, Merrick. Remember how long I was held. He has not only the Si-Fan behind him, but the Reds as well.” He began to pace up and down. “Dr. Fu Manchu has little time left. Tomorrow night Dr. Hessian has agreed to give a demonstration.”

“Tomorrow night!”

“A committee formed by your father, and approved by the President, will be here. Not one word of this must leak out. Their visit is a top secret . . . and Fu Manchu would stop at nothing to prevent it!”

Sleep didn't come easily to Brian that night. Between uneasy dozes, he found himself trying to figure out if Lola really had been called to confer with Madame Baudin, or if she was avoiding being left alone with him, and trying to convince himself that Dr. Hessian's invention was not a mirage, the dream of a mad scientist, but all that Nayland Smith believed it to be.

That Sir Denis deliberately kept him in the dark concerning certain vital facts of the business was beyond dispute. Why? Didn't he trust him?

The crowning mystery, which he had never been able to fathom, was the reason he had been employed. Those qualifications, stipulated in the *Times* advertisement, all of which he possessed, had never been called upon. For all that had happened to date, almost anybody, Ph.D. or coal miner, athlete or cripple, would have done as well.

He switched on the bedside lamp, saw that the time was two A.M., and got up to get a drink. There was beer in the refrigerator. He made his way to the kitchenette and opened a can.

As he poured out the cold beer, he wondered if Nayland Smith had gone to sleep. Carrying the glass in his hand, he walked barefooted to Sir Denis' door to find out.

His door was open, and even in the dim light Brian could see that the bed was unoccupied. There was no light in the living room.

He stood for a moment, hesitating. Then he went out to the foyer.

The door of the suite was unlocked.

In view of what Nayland Smith had told him earlier that night, and of his insistence that the door must always be locked and bolted at night, this was more than puzzling.

Brian knew that he had dozed more than once, but if there had been any struggle it couldn't have failed to arouse him.

While he stood there in a state of indecision, a shot sounded from the penthouse. It was quickly followed by a second and a third. Then a muffled explosion shook the apartment.

Brian ran back to the living room. He switched the light on, set the can of beer down, and crossed to the penthouse phone. Before his hand touched it the instrument rang.

“That you, Merrick?” came Nayland Smith’s voice.

“Yes. What’s happened? Shall I come up?”

“No. Stay where you are. Dr. Hessian called me an hour ago. He had decided upon a test experiment. It was successful. Thought you might have heard something and would be wondering. Turn in. All’s well.” Sir Denis hung up.

Brian wondered if he should obey orders and lock the outer door. He decided against it and went back to bed.

He woke early in the morning, vaguely aware of disturbed dreams in which Nayland Smith had become transformed into a sort of prehistoric monster about to devour him and had then vanished in a dense cloud of smoke.

Wondering why he felt so jaded, he gave an order for coffee and went into the bathroom. If Sir Denis had returned or not he didn’t know, and for some reason he didn’t care. There was no sound in the suite. He was finishing up with a cold shower when the waiter came into the living room.

Brian called out, “Leave my coffee in there, waiter.”

“Yes, sir.” But the man lingered, drew nearer the open bathroom door. “Explosion upstairs last night, I hear. Did it wake you?”

Brian hesitated, towel in hand. He must be cautious.

“Yes, it did. Any damage?”

“Not that I’ve heard. One of those pressure cookers blew up, they say. But nobody hurt.”

“Lucky. I wondered what had happened.”

He was drinking his coffee and glancing over the morning newspapers that the man had brought up when Sir Denis burst in. He was dressed in one of his well-cut and well-worn tweed suits, so that evidently he, too, had been an early riser.

“Good morning, Merrick. Sorry about last night. Started a lot of rumors. Not good for us. One thing’s certain—Einstein was an amateur compared to Hessian! I want you with me up there tonight. You’re going to see a miracle.”

When, soon afterward, Nayland Smith dashed out again, saying that he had an important conference at police headquarters, Brian was left as much in the dark as he had been before Sir Denis dashed in. Mingled with the promised excitement of what the night had in store was a growing

resentment at being treated like a figure of no consequence where the big issues at stake were concerned.

Irritably Brian looked at his watch, and decided that it wasn't too early to call Lola. She answered almost at once.

"Did I wake you, dear?"

"No, Brian. I'm all ready to go out. A long day ahead at Michel's, and I was up so late last night. Heaven only knows when I'll be through. This was the job I was brought here to do. I have to pass on all the models who'll display Michel's creations at the show."

"Poor darling! Any hope for lunch?"

"I'm afraid not. It will be sandwiches and coffee from the nearest delicatessen for me. If I can make it between seven and eight for a quick drink I'll call you."

Brian's spirits sank to zero. The Washington committee, headed by his father, was due at eight o'clock.

"I'm afraid I may be tied up by then, Lola. But call anyway. We might fix something for later."

It was a seemingly interminable morning. Around one o'clock Sir Denis called to say that Brian could leave the suite for his lunch, provided he didn't leave the building. "Acting on your advice, I've made other arrangements to safeguard the penthouse. But in case I'm delayed, stand by to receive your father's party from seven on."

Brian lingered over his lunch and then wandered about the huge hotel, hoping to find somebody he knew, but without success. Merely to kill time, he dropped onto a sofa in one of the public rooms and ordered coffee.

A strange-looking man sauntered by. He was young and handsome in a sinister way, with large brilliant black eyes and a dark complexion. Otherwise conventionally dressed, he wore a blue turban. He seemed to have an absorbing interest in the younger women present.

When the waiter brought Brian's coffee, Brian asked, "Is the character in the blue turban staying here?"

The waiter nodded. "Yes, sir. They tell me he's an Indian prince. All I know is he has a servant with him who looks like a gorilla."

Almost on the stroke of seven, Senator Merrick arrived. He was alone.

"This is a very wonderful occasion, my boy," he declared, "and you should be proud that you've been chosen to take part in it. The Secretary of

State is coming, General Jennings, General Rawlins of the Air Force, and Admiral Druce, representing the Navy, and last but not least, Dr. Jurgenson, the physicist and the President's personal adviser on development of atomic projects. Where is Sir Denis? With Dr. Hessian, I suppose?"

"I don't know, Dad," Brian confessed. "But he warned me that he might be late."

The Senator nodded. "He has a heavy load of responsibility on his shoulders."

The party assembled in ones and twos, Nayland Smith last except for Dr. Jurgenson. Sir Denis looked physically exhausted, Brian thought. The three officers, all of them in civilian clothes, showed one trait in common: a reserved but unmistakable hostility for each other.

At three minutes after eight the scientist arrived, a spare gray man in powerful spectacles and a bad temper. He looked around irritably.

"These damn taxi drivers," he muttered. "The one I got tried to bring me up here by way of the Queens Midtown Tunnel!"

The three officers transferred their mutual hostility to the civilian. Nayland Smith said, "If you will be good enough to follow me, gentlemen, we will now proceed to the demonstration."

They filed out and along the corridor to the penthouse door, which proved to be open. Brian's curiosity rose to fever pitch. This was his first visit to Dr. Hessian's hideaway. There was another door at the top of the stairs, which was opened by an expressionless Japanese in a white tunic.

He led them through a foyer crowded with oversize trunks and cases and into what was evidently the main room of the penthouse. Although French windows were opened, so that the light-studded panorama of Manhattan could be seen stretched out below the terrace, the air was heavy with some pungent chemical odor.

The Japanese, apparently Dr. Hessian's assistant, closed the door as the last of the party came in.

"Here, gentlemen, we shall witness a demonstration of Dr. Hessian's supreme achievement."

All eyes became focused on a long, narrow table in the middle of the room. It was entirely covered by a large-scale plan of New York City, from the Battery to the Bronx. Roughly midway on the plan a miniature radio mast stood.

Three large metal balls of some dull metal that looked like lead were suspended above the table from the high ceiling. Hanging down lower than

these was a small box.

Ten chairs were placed around the table, four on either side and one at each end.

“Your places are marked, gentlemen,” the Japanese told them in perfect English. “Writing materials are provided.”

They sorted themselves out, and Brian found himself beside Nayland Smith. Senator Merrick had been placed at one end of the long table.

“Stand by to make notes of anything worth remembering, Merrick,” Sir Denis said in his staccato fashion.

He seemed to be highly strung, or so Brian thought. Nor was he the only one. When everybody was seated, only two chairs remained vacant: the one to the left of Dr. Jurgenson and the one facing Senator Merrick at the other end of the table. A hum of conversation arose, and Brian detected a theme of incredulity running through it.

“Looks like a new gambling game,” Admiral Druce growled. “Where do we put our chips?”

But silence fell suddenly when a strange figure appeared in an inner doorway. A tall man, stooping slightly, he too wore a white tunic, as well as tinted glasses, a small skullcap, and gloves that appeared to be made of black rubber.

“Gentlemen,” the Japanese assistant announced in his toneless English. “Dr. Otto Hessian.” Dr. Hessian rested one hand on the back of his chair and nodded. “Allow me, Doctor, to introduce your visitors.”

And beginning with Senator Merrick, as chairman of the committee, he named them one by one, finishing with “Mr. Brian Merrick, Junior.”

Dr. Hessian nodded to all of them and sat down. He put some typed pages before him, so that they partly hid the Bronx.

“If you please,” he began in a marked German accent, “of English I have not enough properly to explain myself. So these notes I have had translated from German more clear to make it—what I have to say.”

There was a faint murmur of sympathy. Evidently Dr. Hessian could see quite well through his dark glasses, for he now consulted his notes and went on, speaking better English but with no better accent:

“Sound vibrations, like all others of which we have knowledge, move neither straight up nor straight along, but so” One black-gloved hand described an arc. “They conform to the shape of the envelope in which the earth is enclosed: our atmosphere. Very well. There are sound vibrations, many of them inaudible to our ears, that can shatter a glass goblet. There are

others, fortunately rare under normal conditions, that are even more destructive. Such a vibration I have succeeded in producing.”

He raised his head, looked around. But although one or two of his audience stirred restlessly, no one spoke.

“It is not only inaudible, but no receiver yet invented—except mine—can transmit it. So. It is as simple as this. Very well. Above my target area”—he laid a hand on the plan—“a plane flies at a given altitude. The antenna projecting above this plane carries a special receiver from which this vibration, inaudible to human ears, is cast upon the atmosphere. The plane, although in fact below the denser sound belt, is immunized.”

Another voice broke in. “What do you mean by ‘the denser sound belt’?”

Dr. Hessian looked up from his notes and stared at the questioner. “It is Dr. Jurgenson who speaks? I thought this. No doubt you speak also German? Be so good, Doctor, as your question to repeat in German.”

And then began a heated exchange in that language, which rose to a pitch of violence. At this point Senator Merrick banged his hand on the table.

“Gentlemen! In the first place, many of the committee don’t know what you’re talking about. In the second place, you are delaying the demonstration that we are here to see.”

Dr. Hessian nodded and looked down again at his notes.

“I am far from satisfied,” Dr. Jurgenson muttered.

“The demonstration will explain my words,” Hessian’s guttural voice continued. “My assistant will now lower the objects that you see suspended there.”

These objects which had excited so much interest, were attached to hooks in the ceiling by slender wires. The Japanese assistant lowered the one suspended above the Battery.

“Open please the container,” Dr. Hessian directed.

The halves of the dull metal ball opened on a hinge. The ball contained a large coconut. Everybody laughed, except Dr. Jurgenson.

“Preposterous!” he choked.

But Dr. Hessian, quite unmoved, went on to explain, “This nut, although out of proportion to the scale of the plan, represents an enemy dive bomber that has penetrated the air defenses and will presently swoop down upon lower Manhattan to discharge its load of destruction. The coconut has been

drained, so that its center is hollow. These containers are immunized against any sound vibration. Close and return, please.”

The metal ball was reclosed and hoisted back to its place.

“Each of these has a trigger on the top, which releases the contents when a ball is raised to touch the ceiling,” the guttural voice explained. “And now, the guided missile that could destroy the whole city.”

A second metal ball, hanging over midtown New York, was lowered. It was evidently very heavy. The Japanese, leaning over between Admiral Druce and General Rawlins, opened the container. In it, point downward, and carefully held in place by the Japanese, lay what looked like a miniature torpedo.

“Here is a scale model of the latest guided missile, with an atomic warhead, as it would reach our atmosphere with what I may term its outer garments discarded.”

Those farther removed from the center of the table stood up and eagerly grouped themselves behind Admiral Druce and General Rawlins for a close view of the model.

“I completed it in Cairo,” Dr. Hessian told them. “Only externally is it true to type. It weighs nearly eight pounds and has a small charge of high explosive for the purpose of this demonstration. It is so weighted that it will fall nose downward. Close and return, please.”

Looking puzzled and excited, everybody went back to his place as the metal ball was swung up again to the ceiling. Dr. Jurgenson shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“Exhibits A and B I have shown you,” Dr. Hessian said in his guttural monotone, reading from his notes. “Exhibit C, just above me, represents a sneak raid on the Bronx.”

The metal ball nearly above his head was lowered. He opened it himself, and displayed a Colt .45.

“I shall detach the weapon from its container.” He did so. “Because, in this case, it remains there throughout the experiment. It is set at safety. But, before I return it, the revolver will be ready for fire. I shall request General Rawlins to confirm the fact that the cartridges are live.”

It was passed to the General, who took out several shells, nodded, replaced them, and handed the weapon back to the Doctor. He adjusted it and the metal ball was raised to its place.

“This exhibit is so adjusted,” Dr. Hessian explained, “that whenever the trigger of the revolver is brought in contact with the ceiling, the revolver

fires a shot at the Bronx. And now, my final exhibit: the small box that you see suspended roughly above the center of Manhattan. Time prohibited the preparation of a model of an airplane resembling the one I have described. Therefore, if you please, imagine that this is such a plane. Its height above the city is out of proportion to the scale plan. An altitude of three miles would be enough. But I have set it much higher purely in the interest of your safety. I beg, from the moment contact is made—watch for the red light—that you will all remain seated. On no account stand up.”

Brian experienced a wave of almost uncontrollable excitement. He noted that Nayland Smith’s hands were clenched below the table. Every face he looked at registered high nervous tension.

The Japanese moved to a small side table and opened a cabinet that stood there.

“A very ordinary transmitter, gentlemen,” Dr. Hessian said, “Such as any amateur can make. But a mechanism is attached which no one but myself could make. It transmits the lethal note that can throw a protective umbrella over the whole of New York City. Proceed.”

Brian held his breath. Looking upward, he saw a speck of red light glow in the suspended “receiver.” There was no sound.

“Contact is established,” Dr. Hessian declared. “The enemy approaches.”

The unemotional Japanese returned to the center table.

“Hold out your hands, Senator Merrick,” the now commanding voice ordered. “Prepare to catch the debris of the dive bomber.”

Brian saw his father’s color change slightly; but he stretched out his hands, looking up.

The metal ball opened. The big coconut fell.

While it was still well above the heads of the seated committee, it disintegrated into bits. Fragments of shell and pulp shot miraculously across space to be piled against the walls.

A concerted gasp told of the reactions of the committee.

“And now, if you please, the guided missile.” Dr. Hessian looked up from his notes. “You will note, Dr. Jurgenson, that any hollow object is burst instantly on contact with my sound belt. Had you so indiscreet been as to stand up, imagine what happens to your head!”

Before Dr. Jurgenson could think of a suitable reply, the second ball was opened. The miniature projectile fell swiftly. Several heads were ducked, protective arms raised.

There was a shattering explosion. Fragments of metal spurted across the room as the shell of the coconut had done. Plaster fell from walls as they became spattered with this shrapnel, yet not one particle fell on the table or on the surrounding carpet.

“The guided missile is dispersed.” Dr. Hessian spoke calmly. “In practice the inaudible sound would be greatly amplified. There would be a thunderstorm far above New York of a violence that no man has ever heard. But nothing more. The protective belt would also be relayed to outlying points. I could throw up a ceiling of sound over the whole of New York City at a cost below that of maintaining a fighter squadron for a month. And now, gentlemen, the sneak raid on the Bronx.”

As Dr. Hessian laid his hand on that section of the plan, the Japanese, standing beside him, head carefully lowered, stretched forward and grasped the suspended ring.

“Proceed.”

The ring was jerked sharply. A spurt of flame spat down out of the opening in the container. A dull impact . . . a cloud of gray vapor spread like smoke across the air, and a flattened bullet rebounded nearly to the ceiling and finally came to rest against an indentation in the wall made by shrapnel from the “guided missile.”

Two more shots were fired, with similar results. The spectacle was bewildering, for the effect, as the visitors looked upward, was as though a sheet of miraculously impenetrable glass extended horizontally across the room.

But there was nothing—nothing visible . . .

“Let no one stir,” Dr. Hessian warned. “Cover everything up.”

The Japanese went out and returned with several large sheets. One he spread over the table. Others were laid on the surrounding carpet.

“Disconnect.”

A switch was moved in the nearby cabinet, and as if a palpable obstacle had been drawn aside, down showered debris of all the experiments.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AT the conclusion of that amazing demonstration in the penthouse, Dr. Hessian had excused himself and retired. He had been at work day and night, he explained, ever since his arrival, and was far too weary for debate. He referred members of the committee to his assistant, Dr. Yukio Tani, who was qualified to answer all their questions. Dr. Jurgenson had tried to detain him, but Hessian had merely nodded and gone out.

Then the imperturbable Japanese scientist had been made the target of a verbal bombardment. But he had never faltered, never changed the tone of his voice, even when others were shouting. Nayland Smith had tapped Brian on the shoulder and nodded toward the door.

When they were back again in their own quarters, Sir Denis said, "We're out of our depth up there. But words can't alter facts." He poured out two liberal shots of Scotch. "Otto Hessian has solved the problem of protection from all forms of air attack. You agree?"

"I can't doubt it. The thing's a miracle. It's magic."

"There's no difficulty whatever in throwing up this sound ceiling over a wide area. Strong feature is the low cost. Everybody's convinced, of course. But old Jurgenson is boiling with professional jealousy. Your father has tried to persuade the Japanese to get Hessian to set up his apparatus in Washington for the President's O.K. But Hessian blankly declines. Genius has its privileges. It's a case of Mohammed and the mountain. The President will come."

"Here?" Brian jerked out, startled by such a proposal.

"Here, Merrick, and soon. You saw the vacant chair at the table? That's for your father. The place he occupied tonight will be reserved for the President."

When presently the members of the committee reassembled, it was clear that their opinion was unanimous. Even Dr. Jurgenson was forced to admit that Otto Hessian had broken new ground in the problem of air defense, opening up a prospect of complete immunity on a remarkably low budget.

"Secrecy and speed are vital," he declared. "Dr. Hessian, whom I know only by name, has vilely bad manners, but he clearly knows his subject."

“I’ll see the President tonight,” Senator Merrick promised. “He’s expecting me to report to him, however late I get back. Dr. Hessian is certainly a most irascible character, and I must persuade the President to come here, incognito, without delay, not later than tomorrow or Friday. Not a word of this must leak out. There will be no press conference, gentlemen.”

“Every conceivable precaution has been taken,” Nayland Smith assured him. “You all entered the hotel by a door not normally in use and came up in a reserved elevator.”

“I thought the man on duty looked hard at me,” Dr. Jurgenson complained.

“Quite likely. He’s an FBI agent.”

In a hotel bedroom a stockily built Asiatic, with thick, sensual features and fierce eyes, was listening to a voice that came out of an open suitcase standing on a trestle. It was a sinister, sibilant voice, its curious quality enhanced by the language in which it spoke—Hindustani.

“You understand that this is the emergency called Project Zero?”

“I understand, Master.”

“Is Nogai with you?”

“He is downstairs, Master.”

“Order him to avoid the public rooms. He has attracted attention. Because he is registered as a raja’s son he must not act like one. Both remain in your apartment until further orders. Take your meals there. Now, repeat your emergency instructions.”

“Yes, Master. At the signal—”

“Repeat the signal.”

“Three raps on the door.”

“Continue.”

“The door will be locked on the other side and I will unlock it on this side. I put all lights out. I open the door enough to see in, and wait for the man to come. The first time he has his back to me, I act.”

“You must make no mistake.”

“I never make mistakes, Master. Nogai and I open the big box and drag him in. We close the door and wait for further orders.”

“And if he is not alone?”

“Nogai goes to the front door and rings. Whichever one answers, I deal with the other. Nogai deals with the man at the door.”

“Silently!”

“Nogai’s method is as silent as mine, Master.”

A few minutes later, a woman seated manicuring her fingernails was addressed by the same strange voice, speaking in French, from a cream leather toilet case on the table beside her. She started nervously, staring across the empty room with a haunted look in her eyes.

“I am here, Excellency,” she replied, also in French—apparently her native tongue.

“A general emergency has arisen. You have maintained your contacts with personnel at the airport?”

“I have.”

“Make your own plans, provided I have no occasion to direct otherwise. You know already the information I must have. It is vital that this reaches me *at once*. When you notify me of the expected arrival, you will be directed how to proceed. You understand?”

“I understand, Excellency.”

“No orders, other than those preceded by the code-word Si-Fan, are to be accepted. You understand?”

“I understand perfectly.”

“I count upon unremitting vigilance. Keep in constant touch wherever you are. Report hourly from the time you set out.”

Dr. Fu Manchu leaned back in his chair, his ascetic face lined with anxiety. For more than an hour he had been assembling his forces for some secret purpose that might mean world chaos. He stood up wearily and crossed the small room without a window, which he seemed to use as a remote-control base. Even now it was only dimly lighted by a lamp on a buffet where there were no homely decanters but only an array of chemical equipment and a large medicine chest containing many bottles and phials.

He took a measuring glass and prepared a draught composed of one part of a greenish liquid, two of amber, and one of red. He emptied this carefully into a larger glass and filled it with distilled water. The contents bubbled slightly, became cloudy and then still. Dr. Fu Manchu began to drink when a faint ring sounded. He turned. A speck of blue light had sprung up in the radio cabinet.

Returning to his chair, he moved a switch and spoke: “What have you to report?”

A woman’s voice answered. “Earlier information of the disaster in Cairo is confirmed, Doctor. The person responsible for it I have been unable to

trace, for all have left for Mecca, including the girl Zobeida.”

“The absence of any publicity, of any official reaction, is disturbing.”

“But understandable. The President is expected tonight.”

“I am aware of this, and have spread my net; for the hour of danger is earlier. I am staking everything upon my knowledge of the man. He never does the obvious.”

“You judge wisely, Doctor, I have information from a reliable source that ‘the obvious’ was proposed, but rejected. What you have foreseen will happen.”

“If I could be as sure of one other thing I would trust to Routine Five and cancel all other orders.”

“What is this one other thing, Doctor?” The woman’s voice remained soft but revealed tension.

Dr. Fu Manchu clenched his hands; his features became convulsed, and then calm again.

“His being alone at the crucial moment.”

“If I undertake to arrange this one thing, Doctor, will you give me *carte blanche* to deal with it?”

“You have never yet failed me—not once. And no one ever failed me twice. It is a gambler’s choice—but I have always been a gambler. . . .”

Brian had great difficulty getting to sleep that night. The astounding experiment in the penthouse had left him in a state of high excitement. He would seriously have doubted the evidence of his senses if the wonders he had seen hadn’t been confirmed by other witnesses.

Then, at some remote hour, just as he was dozing off at last, the phone in the living room rang and he heard Nayland Smith’s voice. The conversation was a brief one and a moment later Sir Denis burst in.

“That was your father, Merrick. We’re to expect the President at ten o’clock tonight.”

This made sleep even more difficult. He could not stop thinking. For some reason that he could not grasp, he had been dragged into the heart of a top secret that might very well involve the survival of civilization.

Why? he kept asking himself. *Why?*

But he could find no answer.

Nature conquered at last, and he forgot his problems. It was after nine o’clock when he woke, and he went into the living room to see if Nayland

Smith was there. He found a note on the desk, penciled in block letters, presumably because Sir Denis' handwriting was almost illegible.

It said, "Don't go out until I come back. D. N. S."

Brian took up the phone and asked to be connected with Lola's apartment.

She answered at once.

"Listen, Lola honey—did you call me last night? I had to go out."

"No, Brian. I couldn't make it."

"How are you fixed for today? I'm not certain about lunch, but—"

"I am. I don't get any. There's only one possible spot, maybe an hour, about four o'clock. Will you be free then if I am?"

"I'll see that I am. I'll wait in the Paris Bar. We can't miss each other there."

When presently he hung up, Brian had become uneasily aware of the fact that Lola was preoccupied, keyed up in a new way. He wondered if Madame Baudin had been overworking her, and he wondered, not for the first time, if Lola was changing, slipping away from him. . . .

When Nayland Smith came in, around noon, he showed such signs of agitation that Brian felt alarmed. The state of his nerves on his clandestine first visit was mild compared with his present condition.

"What happened, Sir Denis?"

Nayland Smith turned aside irritably, crossed to the buffet and mixed himself a stiff drink. He dropped down in a chair, took a long swallow, and then raised haggard eyes.

"The worst that could happen, under the circumstances. Dr. Fu Manchu is here."

"Here! You mean in New York?"

"Exactly." He emptied his glass. "In just a few hours the President will leave Washington. I shall find myself up against the mastermind—and Fu Manchu will stick at nothing."

He stood up and refilled his glass.

This was so unlike the abstemious, cool-brained Nayland Smith that Brian had known that he was gripped by a swift and dismal foreboding. Sir Denis was afraid!

The idea chilled him. It was almost unthinkable. But many incidents passed in lightning parade across his mind, incidents that individually had shaken his faith at the time, but that collectively threatened to shatter it.

Suffering had broken this man of iron. It was a tragedy.

“You don’t suggest, Sir Denis, that the President may be in personal danger?”

“Now that Fu Manchu is here, we are all in personal danger. Look, Merrick—I’m going up to see Dr. Hessian. He should know. Go out and get some lunch. When you come back—and don’t hurry—I may be asleep. I had no sleep last night, so don’t disturb me.”

Lingering over his lunch, feeling miserable and about as useful as a stray dog, Brian tried to muster his wandering ideas, to form some sort of positive picture.

Fu Manchu was in New York. And Nayland Smith had gone to pieces.

These two facts he must accept, for they stood for cause and effect. For the first he had been prepared; for the second he had not. As aide to Sir Denis, he would clearly have to take over his responsibilities if his chief failed.

He lacked almost every essential facility. Sir Denis hadn’t troubled to put him in touch with the FBI agents associated with them. He didn’t know one by sight. He had no more than a nodding acquaintance with Dr. Hessian; and for all that scientist’s undoubted genius, he found his personality strangely repellant.

Brian seriously considered calling his father, laying all the circumstances before that man of wide experience, and abiding by his advice. But an implied betrayal of the trust imposed upon him by Sir Denis ruled this plan out.

Yet he had to do something.

It was nearly three o’clock when he went up to the suite. He found a “Do Not Distrub” card outside, but opened the door quietly and went in. A similar card hung on Nayland Smith’s bedroom door. There was a note, in block letters, on the desk. It said:

“Do what you like until seven o’clock, but stay out of the Babylon-Lido until then. Don’t enter on any account. Then wait in the Paris Bar until I page you. This is important. D. N. S.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHEN BRIAN went into the Paris Bar at four o'clock he found it empty, as he might have expected it to be at that hour. Conscientious by nature, he wasn't sure that his being there didn't amount to disobeying Nayland Smith's order, but he couldn't see how standing Lola up could benefit anyone.

He was still studying the problem when Lola came in.

"Lola!" There was no one else in the place, not even a bartender, and he took her in his arms. "I'm so glad you could make it!"

He held her close and gave her a lingering kiss. Then he recovered himself as she drew back and looked up at him with that quizzical smile.

"So it seems, dear." But her gray eyes didn't register resentment; they invited. So did the tempting lips.

Their second kiss was so like one of mutual passion that Brian's heart leaped. Lingering doubts were dispelled. Lola did love him.

"Let's get out of here, dearest." He spoke hoarsely. "I want to talk to you alone, and we can't count on having this place to ourselves very long. Queer things are going on." His arm was around Lola's waist. "Where can we be alone—if only for half an hour?"

"Well"—Lola hesitated—"I have one of the tiniest rooms in the Babylon-Lido. Madame doesn't squander money. We could go up there, but —" She glanced up at him.

"I promise to behave."

Lola's room was on the eighth floor; its one window commanded an excellent view of a brick wall. The room wasn't much larger than either of the bathrooms in Sir Denis' suite, but it was delightfully intimate, and Brian's mood of depression magically lifted. When Lola offered him a cigarette, he sparked his lighter, glanced at the cigarette, and paused.

"May I have a light?" Lola said sweetly. "They arrived this morning. Your extravagant tastes need watching."

The cigarettes were Azîzas—those he had ordered in Cairo.

"Did you get my letter, Lola?"

“Yes, it was forwarded. Thank you for everything, Brian. And now, what is it you want to talk about? I warned you, dear, I hadn’t much time. On the stroke of five I have to be off.”

“Then I’d better begin. What I want to say is strictly confidential. But I just have to say it to somebody, and there’s nobody else but you I can say it to. I’m worried about Sir Denis.”

“Why, Brian?” Lola drew her brows together in a frown of concentration. “Is he ill?”

“Yes.” Brian nodded. “Mentally ill, I’m afraid. I think he’s losing his nerve.”

“From your account of Sir Denis, I supposed he had no nerves.”

“So did I. But today he seemed to fall apart.”

“Why? Has something happened?”

Brian began to remember that it was his duty to keep his mouth shut. He must put a curb on his confidences. But he believed in Lola’s worldly wisdom, and desperately needed her advice.

He glanced at her. It had occurred to him almost from the moment of their meeting that she kept up her usual air of easy self-possession only by means of a sustained effort. Perhaps his passionate greeting had shaken her. But certainly, although she masked the fact, she was queerly keyed up. She kept glancing at her watch.

“Sir Denis seems to think some new danger has developed,” he told her.

“Danger? To whom?”

“To all of us, I guess.” He began to grope for words. “My father’s expected tonight, and some other important people. If this danger is real, I’m wondering if I should stop them.”

“Surely Sir Denis would have stopped them himself if he couldn’t guarantee their safety.”

“You don’t know,” Brian said, “how completely he’s gone to pieces.”

“Well, surely you could at least discuss it with him, since your father is involved.”

Brian shook his head wearily. “He’s asleep up there. And I have his written order. Look at this.” From his pocket he took out the note he had found on the desk. “They’ll be on their way before seven o’clock.”

Lola read the note, but made no comment. She passed it back and glanced at her wrist watch.

“What would you advise me to do, Lola?”

She stood up. “In the first place, get a move on. I have to go. As for Sir Denis’ order, I’d say do nothing—except obey it to the letter.”

With a sense of desolation Brian watched Lola’s taxi weave its way into the traffic torrent and finally become lost to view. She had her troubles, too, he knew, although they didn’t involve millions of human destinies, but only the vanity of a few wealthy women who bought their dresses at Michel’s.

He started away at a brisk pace toward Central Park. An hour’s walk in the fresh air might help him to shake off his gloom.

From the moment he entered the Park he hardly noticed where he was going. Evening was drawing on when he found himself passing behind the Metropolitan Museum and pulled up to check the time. He decided to turn back, swung around, and saw that the only other pedestrian in sight, a man walking twenty yards behind him, had done the same.

He thought nothing of this at the moment. Returning along the same path, he saw the man ahead turn to the left, toward an exit on Fifth Avenue. Brian passed on, nervously considering the night’s program, wondering why the mere approach of Dr. Fu Manchu had so shattered Nayland Smith’s courage and what it could be that Sir Denis feared. Did he seriously believe the President’s life to be in danger? And did he doubt his own ability to protect him?

Something prompted Brian to pause and look behind.

The man he had supposed to have left the Park was following him again. Anger came first, then an unpleasant chill.

His follower might be an agent of Dr. Fu Manchu, or he might be one of the FBI men detailed, according to Sir Denis, to keep him under observation. In any case, it was getting dark, the Park seemed deserted, and Brian went out by the 72nd Street exit and hailed a taxi.

In the main entrance to the Babylon-Lido he looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to seven.

He turned away and walked around the corner. He had noticed a little bar almost directly facing the trade entrance to the hotel and decided that he could pass the time there over a drink. It was better than walking up and down, he was tired of walking now, and feeling thirsty.

Taking a corner stool just inside the door, he ordered a drink, lighted a cigarette, and settled down to wait for seven o’clock.

For what possible reason had Nayland Smith banished him from the Babylon-Lido until that hour? It was incomprehensible. Unless, which

seemed probable, he was followed by a federal agent wherever he went, why was Sir Denis' warning never to go out alone apparently forgotten?

Either he had become a mere cipher in the game, or Nayland Smith had thrown his hand in and didn't care what happened.

Brian started a fresh cigarette, looked at his watch. Ten minutes to wait.

With some unknown menace embodied in the name Dr. Fu Manchu hanging over the party assembly tonight—a party to include the President—this enforced inaction was almost unendurable. Brian found it nearly impossible to remain still.

He stared out of the window—and became very still indeed; so still that he might have been suddenly frozen to his seat.

Lola was standing in the trade entrance to the Babylon-Lido talking to Nayland Smith.

Her face was in shadow, but she was dressed as he had left her at five o'clock. This time there could be no room for doubt. Nor could he be wrong about the man. It was Sir Denis. The coat, the soft-brimmed hat, his stance—all were unmistakable. He saw them go in.

In half a minute he had paid for his drink and dashed recklessly across the street, ignoring the traffic lights.

He had never been in this warren of storerooms, cellars, and kitchens before, but somehow he made his way through and at last penetrated to the vast but now familiar lobby. His heart was beating fast. What had Lola to do with Nayland Smith? She had told him only that afternoon that she had never met Sir Denis.

The clock over the reception desk recorded five minutes to seven.

People buzzed about in a state of perpetual motion. They all appeared to be in a hurry. Smart women in mink stoles who couldn't find their men, eager-eyed young men rushing around looking for their girls, businessmen dashing for telephones . . . the scene seemed to swim before Brian like a color film out of focus. It was a ballet inspired by a mad director.

But the two figures he was looking for were not to be seen.

He debated with himself, looking again at the clock. He could endure this suspense no longer. He must know the truth, orders or no orders. To wait to be paged in his present frame of mind was out of the question. He turned and hurried off to the corridor where the express elevators were located. The man on duty knew him and smiled a greeting as Brian stepped in.

"Sir Denis has just gone up, sir," he reported.

Brian experienced a fluttering sensation in the pit of his stomach.

“Was he alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

The elevator began its ascent. Nayland Smith, Brian reflected, must have gone out to meet Lola. They had evidently parted on entering the hotel. But why had they come in by the trade entrance? He could only conclude that the meeting had been a clandestine one.

When he arrived at the top floor he stood for a moment to get a grip on himself. Then he walked along to the door of Suite 2610. The “Do Not Disturb” card had gone. He quietly slipped the key into the lock and opened the door.

Dusk had fallen now and he saw that lights were on in the living room. There was no sound.

He walked in quietly . . . then gulped, and stood quite still.

Flat on his back on the floor, his knees drawn up, his fists clenched, lay Nayland Smith. His face was purple his teeth were bared, and his eyes bulged from his head.

He had been strangled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE horror of his discovery quite literally paralyzed Brian. His senses were numbed. He stood speechless, incapable of movement, of thought.

A slight sound from the direction of the desk roused him, bringing swift realization of his own danger. He turned toward the desk, and his brain reeled. He was gripped by the agonizing certainty that the murder of Nayland Smith had disturbed his reason.

Standing beside the tall, painted screen, a finger on his lips, urgent command in his eyes, and beckoning Brian to join him, was *Nayland Smith*.

Brian clenched his fists, glanced from the dead man to this phantom of the living.

The living Sir Denis was beside him in three strides. He gripped Brian's arm, speaking softly into his ear: "Not a word! Behind the screen, Merrick—for your life—and for mine!"

There was nothing ghostly in the grip of those sinewy fingers, nothing but vital urgency in the whispered orders.

Brian found himself in shadow behind the screen. One spear of light shone through a hole in the parchment, and, still half stupefied at this incredible situation, he saw Nayland Smith jab his thumb through another panel in the screen and make a second hole.

"Look!" came a whisper in his ear. "Do nothing. Say nothing."

Silence.

Peering through the slot in the parchment, Brian focused on the dead man. For all that agonized expression, the swollen features, the protruding eyes, he was prepared to take oath and swear that it was Sir Denis who lay there. But another Sir Denis, very much alive, stood beside him, and continued to grip his arm!

Then he noticed something he hadn't noticed before.

A door that communicated with the next suite, normally locked, stood partly open. The room beyond was in darkness.

Two men came through the door. The first was a thickset Oriental whose coarse, brutal features and abnormally long arms were more simian than

human. The second Brian recognized; it was the slender, elegant man the waiter had reported to be an Indian prince.

They lifted the body and carried it out. The communicating door was closed.

“Don’t speak!” The words were whispered in his ear. “This room is wired.”

The new Sir Denis crossed to the recently closed door and locked it. He turned and beckoned to Brian to follow him. In the foyer he whispered, “Say nothing, but take your cue from me.” Brian nodded. Nayland Smith opened the outer door then shut it again noisily. “Hello, Merrick. You’re a little early.” He spoke now in a loud tone. “Anything wrong? You look under the weather. Go and lie down. I’ll bring a drink to your room.”

Brian crossed, rather unsteadily, to his own room and went in. Sir Denis’ extemporized “cue” wasn’t far from the truth. This experience had shaken him severely. Even now he couldn’t get the facts into focus.

Nayland Smith rejoined him, carrying two drinks. He quietly closed the bedroom door behind him.

“I need one, too, Merrick,” he confessed. “That premature entrance nearly resulted in a second murder—yours!”

“But—”

“Wait a minute.” Sir Denis held up his hand. “Let’s get the important thing settled first, because there’s a lot to say and not much time to say it. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t wonder which of us is the real Nayland Smith. I had a fair chance to study my double, and I felt like a man looking in a mirror. Hark back to the time I stayed in Washington. Ask me something about your home life that nobody could know who hadn’t lived with you.”

Brian tried to force his bewildered brain to think clearly, and presently an idea came.

“Do you remember my father’s dog?” he asked.

“Do I remember Rufus!” Nayland Smith smiled—and it was the smile Brian had known, the boyish smile that lifted a curtain of years. “Good reason to remember him, Merrick.” He pulled up his left trouser leg. “There’s the souvenir left me when I tried to break up a scrap he was having with a Boston terrier. Rufus thought my interference unsporting. It was you yourself who phoned the doctor, and damn it, he wanted to give me rabies shots!”

In that moment, all doubt was washed away. Brian knew that this was the real Nayland Smith, that the man he had been employed to work with was an impostor—and a miraculous double.

He held out his hand. “Thank God it’s *you* that’s alive!”

“I have done so already, Merrick, devoutly. I have passed through the unique experience of witnessing my own execution. I was desperately tempted to rush to the aid of my second self. But to do so could only have meant that the supercriminal, the most dangerous man in the world today, would have slipped again through my fingers. So I clenched my teeth when the thug sprang out on him and said to myself, ‘There, but for the grace of God, goes Nayland Smith.’”

“Who is—who was—the man impersonating you? It was a star performance. Even the British Embassy in Cairo fell for him. So did my father.”

Nayland Smith pulled out the familiar pipe and began to load it.

“So would my own mother, if she had been alive. You’re staring at my pipe? Fortunately I had a spare one with me. The poor devil who was strangled probably has the other in his pocket. I don’t know who he was, Merrick. But he must have been a talented actor, with a nerve of iron.”

“His nerve began to fail.”

“I don’t wonder. They had news of my escape. There wasn’t room in New York for two Nayland Smiths!”

He rapped out the words like so many drum taps, and at a speed that Brian realized his impersonator had never acquired.

“He had every intonation of your voice, Sir Denis. All your gestures, every mannerism. Even that trick of pulling at your ear. And I believe he smoked even more than you do.”

Nayland Smith smiled. “Sounds like overacting. Poor devil, he was probably playing for big stakes. He had several weeks to study me while I was a prisoner in that damned house in Cairo.”

“In Cairo! Then it must have been you yourself I saw in the house of the Sherîf Mohammed!”

Sir Denis stared for a moment, and then said, “This is news, but probably right. You can tell me later. We have little time, and you’re entitled to know the truth.”

He lighted his pipe, stood up, and began to walk about.

“I had been on a mission behind the Bamboo Curtain. We had information that Dr. Fu Manchu was operating with the Red Chinese.

Knowing the Doctor intimately, I doubted this. He controls a world-wide organization of his own, the Si-Fan. And if anyone succeeds in taking over China permanently, it won't be the Communists!"

This was so like what the false Nayland Smith had told him that Brian listened in growing wonder.

"On my way back, by sea—secretly, as I thought—I walked into a trap in Suez that I should have expected an intelligent schoolboy to avoid, and a few hours later found myself a prisoner in the house of the Sherif Mohammed. The Si-Fan had traced me. I was in the hands of Dr. Fu Manchu."

"How long ago was that?"

"Roughly, two months. I had secured evidence that Fu Manchu had recently been in China, for his chief of staff, a brilliant old strategist, General Huan Tsung-chao, was operating undercover right in Peiping. Some highly important scheme was brewing, and I scented that it would be carried out, not in the East, but in the West. I was right.

"It became clear from the beginning of my imprisonment that Fu Manchu hadn't planned to kill me. For some reason, he wanted me alive. My ancient enemy was there in person, in the house of the Sherif Mohammed, and at first I had easy treatment. I was well fed and allowed to exercise in a walled courtyard. But for several hours every day I was brought to a room with barred windows and put through a sort of brain-washing by Dr. Fu Manchu. He spoke to me from behind an iron grille high up in one wall."

"I've seen it."

"Remarkable. Details later. He argued on ideological grounds, tried to convert me to the theories of the Si-Fan. Sometimes he taunted me. He worked over me like a skilled performer playing on a stringed instrument. And not for a long time did the fact dawn on me that every move I made, every word I spoke was being studied by some other person hidden behind the grille.

"He betrayed himself once only, but from that moment I knew he was always there, and a hazy idea of the plot began to appear. Someone was being trained to impersonate me! The scheme wasn't a new one. I believe Fu Manchu had had it in mind for several years; probably searched the world for my near-double. I suspect, though I may be wrong, that tape recordings of these conversations were made on a hidden microphone, to help my understudy to perfect his impersonation at leisure."

“It beats everything I ever heard! Of course you tried to make a getaway?”

Nayland Smith checked his restless steps and stared grimly at Brian.

“During the day relays of Fu Manchu’s professional stranglers had me covered. You saw two of them just now. At night there was a hidden microphone in my room. It not only recorded my slightest movement, but could also be used to transmit a note inaudible to human ears. Its production is Fu Manchu’s secret, as he was good enough to tell me. Its effect would be to kill me instantly by inducing hemorrhage of the brain.”

“But that’s Dr. Hessian’s invention!” Brian broke in.

Nayland Smith relighted his pipe. It had gone out while he was talking.

“Unless my deductions are wide of the mark, Merrick, the man you know as Otto Hessian is Dr. Fu Manchu!”

A faint buzzing reached them from the living room.

“That’s the penthouse!” Brian spoke breathlessly.

“Then I had better answer.”

“But what are you going to do!”

Nayland Smith turned in the act of opening the door. “Whatever the late Nayland Smith the Second was expected to do.”

As the door was left open, Brian could overhear Nayland Smith when he spoke on the penthouse line. The conversation was a short one. He came back, his expression grim, and reclosed the door.

“Tell me, Merrick—is there anything, any trifle, about my appearance that strikes you as different from—his?”

Brian studied the clean-cut features, thinking hard.

“His skin maybe was artificially sunburned. It didn’t look quite natural.”

“Nothing to be done about that. What else?”

“Well, something had happened to the bridge of his nose. He wore plaster the first time I saw him. There was no scar, except when he smiled. Then there was a faint wrinkle where the plaster had been.”

“That may explain what was found in a sort of studio in the Sherîf’s house: a wonderful clay model of my head! These people must have got out in a desperate hurry. The studio adjoined a small operating theatre. It seems likely that my double had undergone plastic surgery. H’m! Must avoid smiling!”

“What was that phone message, Sir Denis?”

“In thirty minutes I’m bidden to a conference with Dr. Fu Manchu, and probably my life hangs on not arousing his suspicions. The odds are in my favor. But my opponent—”

“Where are you to meet?”

“Up in the penthouse.”

“You mean Fu Manchu really *lives* there?”

“It’s his base of operations. I don’t wonder it staggers you. But let me bring you up to date. One day in Cairo there was considerable disturbance in the Sherif’s household. I sensed that something unusual was going on. Of course, it was the departure of Fu Manchu and most of his unsavory crew for the States. Don’t ask me how he travels without being identified, unless he has a magic carpet, because I don’t know.”

“That time, Sir Denis, if I’m not wrong, he traveled with me and your double, posing as Dr. Hessian, in a plane provided by the British government.”

Nayland Smith laughed out loud. “You’re not wrong, Merrick. Thanks for the information. You see, I know his impersonation of an eccentric German scientist. He has worked it before. He’s a master of numberless languages and dialects. To the Western mind, he isn’t typically Chinese. He’s at least as tall as I am, has fine ascetic features and a splendid head. His eyes alone, and his hands, betray the Asiatic.”

“But where is the real Dr. Hessian?”

“If he’s alive—which I doubt—Otto Hessian is probably in Siberia. He disappeared behind the Iron Curtain three years ago. Well, as I said, there was a disturbance in the household—and an unpleasant change for me. I was transferred to a room in the cellar. Unmistakably a dungeon, belonging to the days when the old house had been the palace of some wealthy pasha.

“Merrick, I all but lost hope. Two of Fu Manchu’s thugs had been left behind to guard me, I expected from hour to hour they would get the word to finish me off. My only exercise was walking about the cellar. And the nights were dreadful. I suspected, but couldn’t confirm the suspicion, that some kind of murder machine was installed in my cell.

“Then one night a queer thing happened. I was roused by a faint noise outside my locked door. I thought my time had come. A light shone through the grille, and I called out, ‘Who’s there?’ The light vanished. Complete silence. Nothing happened . . . until the next day.

“Neither of the assassins brought me my breakfast. There wasn’t a sound to be heard. Hours passed. No one came. I asked myself if I was doomed to starve to death. But early next morning a party of Egyptian police,

accompanied by Sir Nigel Richardson of the British Embassy, and Lyman Bostock, his American opposite number, burst into the cellar.”

“How had they traced you?” Brian asked.

“Top marks to your FBI, Merrick. My understudy, who had by then arrived in New York, had excited the suspicion of one of their brightest undercover agents. I suspect—but don’t let it worry you—that *you* may have spilled a hint that gave the clue. A code message reached Bostock. It asked for a *secret* examination to be made of the house of the Sheriff, not neglecting the cellars. A tall order. How the devil they arranged it I don’t know, and they both laughed when I asked them. But I remembered the light through the grille of my cell. Anyway, they succeeded in getting a search warrant. And I can assure you that getting that warrant must have taken a lot of doing! The place was deserted. Not a soul in the building—except myself. The Sheriff had got wind of the thing and pushed off in a hurry with his entire household, including, I was told, several ladies and a fat eunuch. When I heard of the astonishing deception to which Richardson and Bostock had been made parties, I knew that not another hour must be wasted. Both wanted this impostor arrested by the New York police at once. I disagreed.

“I made them see that the archconspirator would slip through our fingers. We must find out first the purpose of this amazing plot—which was what the FBI wanted to know, too. Then we’d have the whole gang in the bag.”

“What I don’t understand,” Brian declared, “is why they left you alive.”

Nayland Smith smiled grimly. “Because somebody blundered—or got cold feet. My cell, as I suspected, was fitted with the brain-blasting equipment, and for purposes of concealing evidence, there was a man-sized bath of curious construction in another room that was intended to contain acid. Something had thrown the gang into a panic, and these little arrangements, by the mercy of providence, were overlooked at the last moment.”

“Tell me one thing, Sir Denis. By what accident did *I* get into the picture, and why?”

“Not by accident, I assure you. Fu Manchu already had me in his hands, and no doubt his agents were combing likely spots for a young, unemployed American with an influential background, to make doubly sure of my understudy’s acceptance. You were the very man. The FBI had agents in London—I don’t know why—and they found out that you had been employed by a Communist group, but they were ordered not to interfere.

Washington had no idea what was brewing, but thought that you, as an innocent accomplice, might come up later with some useful information.”

“You mean”—Brian flushed indignantly—“that I was allowed to walk blindfolded into this thing?”

“I mean that, yes. And don’t glare at me! *I* had nothing to do with it. What’s more, it’s been done before. You see, Merrick, if you had known, you’d have betrayed yourself. Undercover espionage isn’t your field. How well it has worked out you can see for yourself. They are quite sure of you, and so we have the game in our hands.”

Brian lighted a cigarette, but said nothing.

“Well,” Nayland Smith went on, “I got my own way and was smuggled out of Cairo. I traveled as Major S. D. Smith, wearing a toothbrush mustache and a monocle. Not a word was allowed to leak out about the raid on the Sherif’s house. All the same, the Si-Fan got the news. When I arrived at Idlewild, at five-thirty this afternoon, I was met by the FBI. Their star operative, already a member of the Communist party, had managed, by what I can only call a stroke of genius, to become a top executive of the Si-Fan! Every detail of my projected execution was known.

“First, you had to be kept away until it was all over. Second, as it was assumed that I should apply for a spare key and walk right up to the suite reserved in my name—exactly what I had planned to do—my double had orders to go out.”

“Yes?” Brian was getting excited. “What happened?”

“A tactical move by the FBI worthy of Napoleon. My double’s orders were to slip around to a back entrance, go up in the service elevator, and return to the suite. He had to unlock the communicating door and then take cover until I came in and had been liquidated. The FBI men managed to detain him long enough for *me* to come up first, open the door, and lie low. When my wretched double appeared, he got what was coming to *me*!”

“Do you mean to say the police and the FBI suspected nothing right up to the time you were found in Cairo?”

“They accepted Nayland Smith the Second and Dr. Hessian as authentic. They still think Hessian is. They didn’t know where *you* fitted in. In other words, it was the discovery by their agent in London that you had been employed by a Red agent that sparked the inquiry.” Sir Denis glanced at his watch. “And now I must be off. Don’t look so desperate, Merrick! I’m well briefed, and”—he tapped a coat pocket—“prepared for anything. Stand by.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DR. FU MANCHU sat at the long table in the room without windows when Nayland Smith came in. “Sit down,” he ordered. “I have much to say to you.”

Nayland Smith sat down in a chair on the other side of the table. He found that while Fu Manchu’s face remained in shadow, his own was brightly lighted. As of old, he experienced a tingling of the scalp when he came close to the force that seemed to proceed from this evil superman. He recalled the form of address he had been told to use.

“At your service, Excellency.”

Fu Manchu watched him. A stray beam of light touched the green eyes. Their regard was hard to meet.

“You did well, William Hailsham,” the sibilant voice said, “until I had to warn you that your prototype had escaped death and was on his way. Your behavior in face of danger disappointed me. I asked myself if I had rescued a cur from a Soviet labor camp for this!” The strange voice hissed the last word. “Your political views terminated your career as an actor. Your arrogance offended even your Communist employers. I alone offered you a way to speedy fortune and security.”

Nayland Smith remained silent. Dr. Fu Manchu took a pinch of snuff.

“I am too closely tied to this project. I had hoped to bring with me what you would term a ‘stand-in’ for Dr. Hessian, as you are ‘stand-in’ for Nayland Smith. Unfortunately, certain surgical treatment proved unsatisfactory at the last moment. Therefore, my personal presence, although dangerous, is necessary.”

He closed the lid of the silver snuffbox.

“The first crisis is over. Those responsible shall pay a heavy price. There is only one Nayland Smith—yourself. But—falter tonight, and there will be *no* Nayland Smith.” He passed his hand over his high brow. “I regret the necessity. Physically, you might have been twins. But there the likeness ends. Had the real Nayland Smith been my ally instead of my enemy, I should sit today on the throne of an empire greater than Rome ever knew. Listen.”

And Nayland Smith listened intently.

“The entire routine for tonight is changed. You handled the premature appearance of that impetuous fool Merrick very well. You seemed to have recovered your nerve—for you had no more than locked the communicating door when he arrived. I have not lost hope that you may carry off the situation tonight.”

Dr. Fu Manchu paused, and his eyes seemed to film over; but soon he went on:

“The plan of the Reds was to ensure that a certain message to Congress should not be sent. This you know. It was a desperate plan, and a bad one. I never intended to carry it out. This also you know. My own plan would have served the same purpose, but gone further. For, with the acceptance of the so-called ‘Hessian Sound Zone,’ I should have had access to every important air base, every military objective, from coast to coast. I should have made them invulnerable!” His voice quivered with the enthusiasm of the fanatic. “Then—at last—I could have challenged the power of communism . . . and broken it!”

Fu Manchu raised clenched hands above his head, then lowered them. He spoke softly.

“These are your new orders. . . .”

Brian paced the living room like a man possessed.

He had been allowed to become a party to a conspiracy directed against the United States government by the very people sworn to defend it; used as a tool! He grew hot with indignation. The mystery that had puzzled him all along was a mystery no more. He had been employed solely as a link with his father, and, through his father, with the President.

But it was the part played by Lola Erskine that crowned his misery. Peter Wellingham, he knew now, was a Red agent. Beyond doubt he had been right when he thought it was Lola he had seen with Wellingham in Hyde Park. Lola had drawn his attention to the *Times* advertisement. If any room for doubt had remained, seeing her in the company of the false Nayland Smith would have swept it away. How little either of them could have suspected that their murder plot was known!

Brian groaned in his misery. From first to last he had been in the hands of creatures of Dr. Fu Manchu. Zoe Montero, Ahmad—all had played him like a hooked fish.

He remembered bitterly Lola’s saying of the *Times* advertisement, “It read like a job created purposely for you.” It *had* been created purposely for

him, and she knew it.

Fu Manchu or the Reds, whichever of them she worked for, had sent her off to New York to take him over as soon as he arrived. They were naturally anxious to know if he suspected anything. Many of her questions about Nayland Smith recurred to him, and he could see their purpose now. Perhaps little Zoe alone had really weakened and tried to help him.

He would have loved to think so.

But Lola . . .

It called for a mighty effort to put his own petty troubles aside, to get back to the concrete inescapable fact that he was still involved in a giant conspiracy that might change world history.

He looked at the time. Surely Sir Denis should be back by now.

And, as he arrived at this conclusion, Sir Denis did come back. He entered quietly, put one finger to his lips, and pointed to the open door of Brian's room.

They went in, and Nayland Smith closed the door.

"Lucky I was warned that our living room is wired," he remarked. "Well, I think I've passed, Merrick. At least, I'm still alive! But those X-ray eyes may have seen more than Fu Manchu thought it diplomatic to give away. He was employed by the Reds—rather reluctantly, I gather—to carry out a certain scheme."

"Your double told me the same thing. That Fu Manchu had been employed to keep Dr. Hessian's invention from falling into the hands of the United States."

"That was the story my double sold to the authorities. Remember, he was accepted for myself. Hessian wasn't doubted. The only dark horse in the stable was *you*. The FBI rarely let you out of their sight."

"You mean they suspected me of being a Red spy?" Brian blazed angrily.

"They didn't know what or whom to suspect, Merrick, until I came on the scene. By the way, they'll be expecting me to report. But I'm in rather a quandary."

"If Fu Manchu already knows the secret of this sound cover, what on earth is he doing here?"

Nayland Smith laughed dryly. "What Fu Manchu himself described to me as the so-called Hessian Sound Zone he really meant to place in the hands of the United States! He had no intention of following his Red instructions. These were designed simply to keep the President from

upsetting certain of their plans. It involved an urgent telephone call from the White House, a mouthpiece that ejected an odorless gas, and some other details that Fu Manchu could undoubtedly have provided.”

“But why such an elaborate setup?”

Nayland Smith began to fill his pipe, glancing aside at Merrick.

“Have you ever thought how hard it would be to get the President of the United States *alone*? Had the Red plan been carried out, he would have been alone at the phone in an anteroom of the penthouse tonight. He would have been struck down by what any physician would have diagnosed as a heart attack, and been incapable of transacting any business for a long time.”

“Good God! What a villainous plot!”

“But child’s play for Dr. Fu Manchu. That’s why he was employed.”

“Then the Hessian Sound Zone is just an illusion—a hoax?”

Nayland Smith dropped his pouch back into his pocket and struck a wooden match.

“Not a bit of it. The Sound Zone is Dr. Fu Manchu’s invention. He’s a scientific genius. The thing is an astounding reality.”

“Astounding’s an understatement.”

“It would give complete immunity from blast. No projectile could penetrate it. The nuclear fall-out would be dispersed over a wide area of the upper atmosphere. This, if such horrible weapons are ever used, is unavoidable. The consequences would depend upon the direction of the wind, over which no man, not even Dr. Fu Manchu, has control.”

“Then why not let bygones be bygones, if Fu Manchu has really come clean?”

“Because, to mention one reason, its adoption, while making America, and I suppose the other Western allies, immune to direct air attack, would also give the Si-Fan absolute control of the Near and Far East.”

“But if it’s real—”

“Just so, Merrick.” Sir Denis lighted his pipe. “That’s why we have to hold the candle to the devil. That’s why we can’t arrest the two assassins next door, and produce the body that I suppose is hidden there. That’s why I don’t know what to report.”

Brian was dumbfounded. “You mean that, after what happened tonight, Fu Manchu will still go ahead with his project?”

Nayland Smith nodded. “It’s his master plot. He won’t give it up easily.”

The smell of tobacco smoke spurred Brian to light a cigarette; to put himself in the background; to concentrate on these vast issues at stake.

“This master plot may be clear to you, Sir Denis, but I can’t get it. Why would the fact—and I accept your word that it *is* a fact—that the West was safe from air attack help this amazing man to take over the East?”

“Because the Reds, helpless to retaliate, could be blasted into submission or unconditional surrender. And the vast underground movement that he has developed throughout the East would seize power. There’d be no holding him. I assure you, Merrick, that Hitler and Stalin were babes and sucklings compared to Dr. Fu Manchu.”

Nayland Smith continued his usual promenade. Brian was deep in thought.

“His cutting in with a double for yourself,” he admitted, “wasn’t far short of criminal genius. His preparations to handle the things if you happened to be alive were masterly.”

“Dragging the son of a prominent Senator and friend of the President into his program also had elements of talent,” Sir Denis remarked dryly. “Never underestimate Dr. Fu Manchu. If he hadn’t been bitten by the bug called Power he would be honored today as one of the world’s greatest intellects. Fortunately in this case, like many men of genius, he’s more than slightly mad.”

“But what are you going to do?” Brian demanded. “The FBI must know now that Dr. Hessian isn’t the real man.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Nayland Smith snapped. “I haven’t told them. I alone know the fate of the real Hessian. They accepted my double and Hessian as authentic. They began to worry about Nayland Smith the Second; thought I had been brain-washed or something. But they never doubted Hessian. They know now that my understudy wasn’t Nayland Smith, but they believe that Hessian is Hessian and that the purpose of the plot is to steal his invention.”

“Then why keep them in the dark?”

“Because, as he believes I am his own man, I hope, Fu Manchu still plans to meet the President tonight and to hand over his system to the United States! The late Nayland Smith the Second was an actor called William Hailsham, an active member of the Communist party. My orders are to tell the committee that the impostor attempted to kill me and that in self-defense I strangled him!”

“But are you really going to do it?”

Nayland Smith pulled at his ear. “I don’t know. I’m thinking hard.”

This remarkable conversation was still going on in Brian’s room in Suite 2610 when a tall, spare figure wearing a long black coat and a wide-brimmed black hat rapped in a peculiar manner on the door of Suite 2611.

The door was opened immediately by the slender man who wore a blue turban.

He salaamed deeply. "Master!"

Dr. Fu Manchu walked in with his majestic yet curiously feline step, and in the main room, which, although richly furnished, was smaller than that in the adjoining suite, faced the second occupier, whose apelike ugliness had so appalled Brian when he had seen him through a hole in the screen.

He too saluted the Doctor as one doing reverence to a pagan god.

"Everything found in his possession," Fu Manchu demanded, speaking Hindustani. "Quickly. Show me."

The thickset man ran to an open suitcase, took out a parcel, and spread all it contained on a table. "Here is everything, Master."

Fu Manchu examined the exhibits found on the person of the dead man, one by one. A silver disk stamped with a number and a curious design seemed to excite him strangely. His eyes, when he raised them, gleamed with the light of madness.

He turned, pointed to an outsized wardrobe trunk standing against the wall. On it was painted "Prince Ranji Bhutani."

"Unlock it!" he commanded.

The younger man, his handsome but sinister features registering intense alarm, produced a bunch of keys and unlocked the big trunk.

Upright inside, and secured with leather straps, the double of Nayland Smith stood, his head drooping so that the swollen features were in shadow. Dr. Fu Manchu stepped forward and tilted the head upward—no easy matter, for the neck muscles were already stiff.

From a pocket of his black coat he took out a lens and, peering closely, examined the nose of the victim.

He replaced the lens, turned, and struck the long-armed thug a flat-handed blow across the face. The younger killer fell to his knees, clasping his hands.

"Master!"

"Fools!" Fu Manchu's features were contorted; his expression was that of a dangerous maniac. "You have killed the wrong man!" By a stupendous effort of will, he recovered his usual calm. "Relock the trunk. Remain here until further orders reach you."

With his silent, catlike walk, Dr. Fu Manchu turned away, opened the door, and went out. He passed the suite occupied by Nayland Smith, and went up to the penthouse. In the dark room adjoining that equipped for the

demonstration he seated himself at the radio switchboard and made an adjustment.

A point of blue light appeared. A woman spoke. "Yes, Doctor?"
"Tonight's plans are changed. Report to me immediately."

At about this time, Brian, chain-smoking in his agitation, was watching Nayland Smith pacing the floor of the room like an English guardsman on sentry duty. At last Sir Denis broke his long silence.

"I have chosen my course, Merrick. Heaven grant it's the right one. Bearing in mind what I mean to do tonight—*must* do—I doubt if Fu Manchu's secret device would be handed over. He has the cunning of the serpent. He takes fantastic risks, but always assures himself of a way out. My explanation to the committee, which I am supposed to give verbatim—the deceased actor was evidently a quick study—would certainly break up the conference."

"Sure! Just what I was thinking! The meeting tonight—"

"I can't believe that a man so astute as Dr. Fu Manchu ever intended it to take place. He has changed his plans. He may be laying another trap—he may be preparing to make a getaway. This could only mean that the cunning devil recognized me."

"Then why didn't he bump you off when he had you up there in the penthouse?"

"Think again, Merrick," Sir Denis snapped. "Consider *two* dead Nayland Smiths on his hands in the Babylon-Lido! No. There hasn't been time to move the other one. We may lose the secret of the Sound Zone, but at last, we have Dr. Fu Manchu."

"What are we going to do?"

Nayland Smith knocked ash from the hot bowl of his pipe. "I can't stop the others. That doesn't matter. But I shall signal the plane bringing your father and the President, and their course will be changed. We don't know what new devilry may be brewing, and I daren't risk it. Our best defense is attack."

He headed for the door.

"What's my job?" Brian wanted to know.

"We'll slip down and talk to Ray Harkness. He's in charge of the FBI engaged on this job. We have worked together before. This double business

has shaken him badly. Before I went up tonight we arranged a password—in case the wrong man had survived!”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BRIAN saw a smallish, dapper man who might have been an accountant or a bank manager, but couldn't possibly be a detective, except that it happened he was.

He jumped up as they came in.

"Bamboo!" Nayland Smith said. Presumably that was the arranged password. "Virtue triumphed for once, Harkness!"

Raymond Harkness sat down again. "Thank God I see you alive! It was a crazy risk, and in my opinion unnecessary."

Nayland Smith rested his hand on Harkness' shoulder. "Your staff work was excellent. Merrick, here, threatened to disturb the plan at a critical moment. But our luck held, and I held on to Merrick. By the way, you haven't met."

"No." Harkness shook hands with Brian, smiling. "But we've wasted a lot of time covering you, Mr. Merrick. For heaven's sake, what happened? Where's . . . the other one? We knew all the details of the trap, but not what it was planned to do when you walked into it."

"An expert job of strangling. He never uttered a sound."

"Good God! They've murdered their own man?" Sir Denis nodded. "What have they done with his body?"

"Still in the room next to ours, I suppose. But if we're to get the whole gang in the bag I want quick action. You have the list of tenants occupying apartments on our floor?"

Harkness held up a typed sheet. "It's been impossible at short notice, to check all of them. But speaking of the room next to yours—"

"No time now. Look—I'll tell you what we must do. Hold the elevators on this floor. Instruct the operators to tell upgoing passengers to use the stairs beyond this floor. There are two elevators but only one stairway. Post a good man at the stairs on this floor. Order him to direct such passengers to this room. Keep your door open. Tell 'em what you like, but hold 'em."

Harkness raised his eyebrows, but took up the phone and gave these unwelcome instructions to the hotel office, adding, "To go into force as of

now.” He hung up, glanced at Nayland Smith. “Well, what about anyone coming *down*?”

“They must be told to go up again until further notice. Police Department orders. An experienced patrolman in uniform would be best for the stair job.”

Harkness nodded and spoke again on the phone. Then he said, “You’re in charge tonight, Sir Denis, but we’ve worked together before and I like to know what to expect. Do you think it’s a plot against the President?”

“Not against his life, Harkness,” Nayland Smith answered. “At least, I don’t think so. But in any event, he won’t be here. I gave orders a few minutes ago to have his course diverted.”

Raymond Harkness watched Sir Denis with steady eyes.

“Then you believe Fu Manchu is still in New York?”

“I know it.”

“Where?”

“In the penthouse.”

“What!” Harkness sprang up. “Then he’s holding Dr. Hessian! He’s in our hands! What are we waiting for?”

“Go easy!” Nayland Smith smiled his grim smile. “And don’t worry about Dr. Hessian. *I’m* looking after him!”

Harkness sat down again. “You know, now that I hear you and see you, I wonder I ever fell for your double. But at the time I was completely sold.”

“So was everybody else. Who but Dr. Fu Manchu could have pulled off such a thing?”

There was a rap on the room door, and a smart-looking police sergeant came in. Harkness looked up.

“Ah! It’s Sergeant Ruppert. I knew you were detailed for duty here tonight. I want you to stand at the foot of the stairs to the floor above. Stand on the other side of the door. No need to alarm the people on this floor. Anyone wanting to go up is to be directed to this apartment. Make sure they come here, but don’t lose sight of the staircase exit. Anyone coming down is to be sent back—*anyone*. All clear?”

“All ready, sir. But what about the elevators?”

“They’ve been stopped from this floor upward.” Harkness glanced at Nayland Smith. “Anything else?”

“One thing,” Sir Denis said. “Jump to it, Sergeant! Every minute counts!” Sergeant Ruppert nodded and ran out. “Any news from Number One, Harkness?”

Raymond Harkness shook his head. “No. Can’t figure it out. She expected to have something to report on the latest move. It could be useful. But not a word. And we can’t locate her. I hope—”

“So do I.” There was a deep sincerity in Nayland Smith’s voice. “She takes risks few men would take—and Fu Manchu is merciless. . . . How many have you on duty tonight, Harkness?” Nayland Smith asked. “Without Merrick and myself.”

“Eleven. Four FBI’s and nine police. Four in uniform, including the Sergeant, and five plain-clothesmen. If I can count Number One, twelve.”

“Assemble them all here. There are seven apartments upstairs, including mine. I want them all searched. You have keys from the management?”

“Here.”

“I’ll take the key of the stair door to the penthouse and the key of the inside door.”

Harkness passed over three keys. “There are two doors to the penthouse,” he explained. “The second I believe opens into the kitchen.”

“And now, can you lend Merrick a gun?”

“Sure.” Harkness pulled a drawer open and took out a regulation police revolver. “It isn’t easy to carry, Mr. Merrick, but it’s practical.”

“Thanks.”

Brian put the heavy weapon in a coat pocket. He didn’t know what was going to happen, but the more exciting it turned out to be, the better he would like it. He needed an antidote to his mood of angry self-contempt.

“Let the whole party stand by, Harkness,” Sir Denis went on in his quick-fire way, “until I give the word. Merrick and I are going to do a spot of reconnaissance. If a trap is being laid, we don’t want to walk right into it.”

They met no one in the long corridor as they headed toward the elevators. The door to the stairs, with a red light above it, was a few paces beyond. It was that hour which comes in every big hotel when nearly all the guests are either out for the evening or retired to their rooms.

Suddenly Nayland Smith said something that brought Brian to a stop as though he had hit a wall.

“I pray no harm has come to Lola Erskine,” he said.

Brian stood stock-still. Sir Denis paused, looked back, and then stared, amazed, at the suddenly pale face he saw behind him.

“Merrick! What’s wrong? Are you ill?”

Brian tried hard to recover poise. It wasn’t easy.

"I'm sorry. But you *did* say Lola Erskine?"

"I did. What about it?"

"Is she the woman you called Number One, who was expected to report to Mr. Harkness?"

"She is." Nayland Smith stared hard. "She's the star operative I mentioned to you, who had worked her way into the Reds' confidence, and from there—an even more astonishing undercover feat—into the secret order of the Si-Fan. Have you met her?"

"Yes." Brian spoke hoarsely, but had himself in hand again. "In London."

"In London? Then it was she who sent the information that you had been employed by Red agents. Wonderful girl! She was the first person to suspect my double. You see, Merrick, she was working close to Dr. Fu Manchu. Just think of that! A mere girl—and a very pretty one; she met me at Idlewild—getting away with such a thing!"

"I *am* thinking, Sir Denis, and I'm frightened stiff. Because, you see, I'm very fond of Lola."

Nayland Smith smiled—the smile Brian remembered. "Ho, ho! So that's how the wind blows! I'm frightened, too. First, I owe my freedom to her. She was responsible for the search of the house in Cairo—and it's almost certain *you* gave her the clue. Second, I owe her my life. She learned all about the trap set for me here, briefed me, and was instrumental in getting my double's instructions mixed up."

Brian clenched his fist. "If Dr. Fu Manchu has found this out, Sir Denis, he must know—"

"That Lola Erskine has double-crossed him? Yes. That's why I'm frightened."

They had been standing still in the long passage, talking in hushed voices. Now Nayland Smith snapped, "Come on! We must act."

He set off at a run. As they passed the elevators, Brian found himself wondering if a girl like Lola could possibly give a damn for such a despicable, distrustful creature as himself.

Nayland Smith pulled the heavy door open.

"Hello! What's this?"

There was no one there.

"Where's Sergeant Ruppert?" Brian cried out.

Sir Denis raised his hand. "Ssh! We don't know who may be listening. But I don't like it. Come on—and be ready for anything."

He started up the stairs, walking softly, one hand in a pocket of his tweed jacket. At the top he peered out cautiously along the corridor. It was empty from end to end. He banged his fist into the palm of his left hand.

“I should have known better than to rely on one man in dealing with Fu Manchu!”

“What do you figure happened? He didn’t call out. We’d have heard him.”

“*When* it happened is what worries me. How long has this stairway been open? Stand by, Merrick. Have your gun handy. If anyone comes near you, cover him and make him stand still, hands up, until I return.”

Nayland Smith darted back down the stairs.

“When it happened” was fully twenty minutes earlier.

Apartment 2612 was across the passage and not far from Nayland Smith’s suite. A smartly dressed woman, her beauty hallmarked with the stamp of sophistication that some men, particularly young ones, find irresistible, had just come in. She had not long returned from Idlewild where Fu Manchu had ordered her to go to report the instant of Sir Denis’ arrival. She had means of learning such things, for beauty is a key that opens many doors.

Warily she tossed an expensive hat onto the bed and sat down in front of her mirror. She opened a cream leather jewel case, unstrapped a conspicuous, diamond-studded wrist watch, and was about to put it away there when a voice spoke—apparently coming from the watch.

“Where are you now?”

She started, stooped forward, and answered, “Back in my room, Doctor.”

“No one obstructed you?”

“No one.”

“You have done well. You were only just in time. But there is more to do. Put the amethyst ring on your finger. It is live. Be careful not to turn the bezel until needed. Remember, the volume is low. Direct contact is necessary. Wear the diamond watch also. You understand?”

“I understand.”

“Your freedom is in your hands tonight.”

The woman’s eyes opened wide. They were of the color of the ring that Dr. Fu Manchu had ordered her to wear—amethyst—and, with her auburn hair, gave her an exotic beauty. Her delicate color paled as she spoke:

“You mean—my complete freedom?”

“Your absolute freedom. The task I am giving you shall be your last. So you cannot afford to fail. These are your orders. . . .”

As an immediate result of those orders, Sergeant Mike Ruppert, taking up his station at the foot of the stairs, a post that he expected to find very dull, had just ventured to light a cigarette when he heard light footsteps descending.

He dropped the cigarette and put his foot on it, turned—and saw a vision.

A disturbingly attractive woman was coming down. From her slender foot, her arched instep, to the flaming crown of her wonderful hair, Sergeant Ruppert found no flaw in her beauty.

She smiled and tried to pass him.

Sergeant Ruppert intruded his bulk. “Sorry, lady. No one allowed down this way.”

The smile gave place to a frown. “What do you mean, Sergeant?” She had an enchanting accent. “I live here. You can’t keep a guest a prisoner!”

The Sergeant wasn’t enjoying his job. “Department orders, miss. There’s—er—some inquiry going on. It’ll be all clear soon.”

“Soon! But my friend is waiting.”

“He’ll be glad to wait!” Sergeant Ruppert grinned.

A ghost of a smile stole back to the lovely face. “*He* is a *she*, my sergeant! But please let me go. It is bad enough that the elevators are out of order, that I have to walk up and down. But this!”

“That’s right.” The Sergeant was sympathetic. “But it’s not my fault, miss. All I can do is obey orders.”

“It is so stupid!” She pouted. “Never again do I stay at the Babylon-Lido! I shall go up and call the manager. Come with me. You shall hear that I am to be allowed to go out.”

“Sorry, miss. I’d like nothing better, but—”

“I can give you a nice cool drink while I phone.”

Sergeant Ruppert knew nothing about Saint Anthony, but he was going through similar fires. Years of discipline won. Dizzy but unconquered, he told her, “I can’t leave my post, miss.”

“*Ah, parbleu!*” she sighed. (“French!” the Sergeant decided.) “So I am imprisoned, yes?”

“It’s not as bad as that, lady. I’ll tell you what you do. I don’t think it’s meant for a young lady like you to be inconvenienced. So go back to your apartment and call the manager, like you said. Ask him to speak to the officer in charge, and—”

She turned away impulsively. “It is preposterous! All this trouble! Ah! *Mon Dieu!*” She stumbled, turned back, clutched Sergeant Ruppert. “I twist my ankle!”

Her slender hands—he noted a great violet ring on one white finger—slipped around his neck. Her touch made him tremble. And this moment of emotion was the last thing he remembered. She had turned the bezel.

He experienced a sensation as though he had been clubbed on the back of his head, and knew no more.

She had carried out her last task—for she couldn’t afford to fail. In a fractional moment she reversed the bezel—a miniature receiver, tuned to pick up the lethal note from the transmitter in the penthouse. But as the big, good-looking policeman pitched forward and fell on his face, tears dimmed her eyes. She raised the jeweled wrist watch. Her hands trembled when she adjusted the cunning radio mechanism.

“It is done!” she whispered.

“Good. Do not return to your apartment. Whatever you leave behind there shall be recovered or replaced. Walk down one more floor, then use the elevator. You have money with you?”

“As you ordered, Doctor.”

“Avoid observation going out. Use a side entrance. Take a taxi to East Eighty-eighth Street and Park Avenue. A man will be standing outside the drugstore on the corner. He will wear a red rose in his buttonhole. Say ‘Si-Fan’ and he will make all arrangements. Your life is your own.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BRIAN'S vigil at the stairhead proved something of a tax on his nerves.

If the strange and oddly sinister figure who had dominated the meeting in the penthouse was none other than Dr. Fu Manchu, then his uneasy feeling in the presence of the man he had accepted as Otto Hessian called for no further explanation. During the journey from Egypt he had had a strong inclination to avoid him, and, as he now recalled clearly, the bogus Nayland Smith had encouraged him to do so, saying. "He has the brains of a genius but the manners of a gorilla."

And now the fabulous Dr. Fu Manchu was near, on the defensive, at bay. Already he had spirited away a physically powerful police officer, armed and keenly alert to danger.

In the long, lighted corridor there was unbroken silence. Guests occupying the several apartments were probably away for the evening, he assumed—unless (a disturbing thought) there were other apartments as well as that adjoining their own which harbored servants of the Chinese doctor. He saw again, mentally, the two Asiatic assassins dragging away the body of the unfortunate double.

Perhaps they had strangled Sergeant Ruppert!

He changed his position slightly, so that he had his back to a wall, and tried to blot out a ghastly memory of the dead man's face, and to call up the image of Lola.

What had happened to her? He seemed to have lived through another life since that hour in her room. In fact, during this one day he had experienced the summit and the nadir of human emotions: love, when he held Lola in his arms; horror, and a great fear, when he saw Nayland Smith lying dead on the floor. And fear had come again—fear that he was insane—when another Nayland Smith had appeared. The belief, the conviction, that Lola was nothing more than a decoy of Dr. Fu Manchu's had brought a sorrow such as he had never known. And now when he knew the truth, she had gone.

A faint sound broke the silence of the corridor.

Brian stood tense, almost holding his breath, listening.

The sound came from the stairway.

He pulled out the big revolver, readied it for action, and slightly turned his head, looking down. Soft footsteps were mounting the stairs. He raised the barrel, sighting it on the bend at which the person coming up would appear.

No one appeared. But a crisp voice came:

“Don’t shoot, Merrick!”

It was Nayland Smith. A moment later he stood beside Brian.

“Phew!” Brian relaxed. “Glad you spoke.”

“So I see.” Sir Denis commented dryly. “But don’t relax your vigilance. We have the situation in hand, if—”

“If what?”

“If we’re not too late.” Nayland Smith spoke in a low tone. “First, we go to our own apartment. Don’t open your mouth while I try to call the penthouse. Remember, the room has been wired.”

Brian nodded, and they walked along to 2610. Nayland Smith unlocked the door, stood for a moment listening, and then went in. He crossed straight to the penthouse phone, lifted the receiver, held it to his ear a while, and then put it back. He frowned grimly, beckoned to Brian to follow, and went out of the apartment.

“Step as nearly like a cat as you can,” he whispered. “I’m going up to listen at the door. If I hear anything, we won’t go in alone. We’ll have to wait for reinforcements.”

Brian watched while Sir Denis quietly unlocked the door to the penthouse stairs. They stole up.

The stairs opened on a landing, and the door was nearly opposite, as Brian remembered. To their right was the elevator that normally served the penthouse, and, beyond, a second door.

Nayland Smith tiptoed forward, apparently with the intention of pressing his ear to a panel, then paused. Closer contact was unnecessary.

A voice was speaking, muffled by the intervening door, but still audible—a strident, sibilant voice:

“Do you imagine,” it said scornfully, “that your puny interference can check the wheels of the inevitable? The dusk of the West has fallen. The dawn of the East has come.”

Nayland Smith turned, a triumphant grin on his lean face, and pointed to the stairs. Brian followed him down. Sir Denis partly closed the door below.

“You heard him, Merrick—you heard him?” he whispered. “One of his favorite slogans. How often have I listened to it! That’s Dr. Fu Manchu!”

Brian's heart jumped uncomfortably. "Who is he talking to?"
"I'm afraid to Lola Erskine."

Brian went through hours of torture in the few minutes that it took to muster the party. Harkness had a search warrant, and two of the plain-clothesmen came from Homicide, for there was evidence to show that a murder had been committed on the top floor of the towering wing of the Babylon-Lido.

When duties had been allotted, Harkness and another FBI man joined Brian and Nayland Smith, and all four went up to the penthouse. Harkness and his assistant—his name was Dakin—were to deal with the kitchen entrance; Brian and Sir Denis concentrated on the other door.

They stood for a moment, listening.

Complete silence.

"Get the door open!" Brian gasped, quivering with suspense. "For God's sake, open it!"

Nayland Smith, very grim-faced, put the key in the lock. But he never turned it.

"*No, no!*" A stifled scream came from inside. "Don't open that door! It's the end of all of us if you do! Break in at the other end. But don't open that door!"

It was Lola's voice.

Sir Denis grasped Brian's arm in a grip that hurt. He withdrew the key.

"I don't know what this means, Merrick, but we must do as she directs. Come on!" They ran to join Harkness. "In through the kitchen!"

Harkness unlocked the door. The door swung open. Brian tried to hurl himself in. Nayland Smith grabbed him.

"Go easy, Merrick! We can't be sure."

An automatic in his hand, Sir Denis stepped warily into a well-equipped kitchenette. Brian followed. There were traces of that peculiar chemical smell which he had noted before, on the night of the demonstration.

They pushed on into what was evidently a dining room. But it didn't appear to have been used as one. The only window was blacked out with heavy velvet drapes. On the buffet odd pieces of chemical apparatus stood, as well as a number of bottles and phials. There was very little furniture except a narrow table covered with green baize and a large chair. A green-shaded lamp stood on the table—the only light in the room.

Near the lamp was a cabinet the front of which consisted of a small switchboard.

“Some kind of radio control,” Nayland Smith commented.

He was looking at an open door at the other end of the room. And as he looked, there came a stifled cry:

“In here! Hurry!”

Brian, at that wild appeal, pushed past Sir Denis and burst in ahead of the others.

He stopped so suddenly that he was nearly floored by the rush from behind.

The room in which he had witnessed the extraordinary experiment carried out by the man calling himself Dr. Hessian seemed to swim before his eyes. The plan of New York City covered the whole of the top of the long table, but the rows of chairs had been removed. The metal containers that had hung from the ceiling were there no longer. The radio set that produced the “inaudible note” remained in its place on a bureau. A small box, which might have been the one used at the demonstration to represent a specially equipped plane, stood on one end of the table.

Nearby, in a heavy armchair, Lola was seated, white and wild-eyed. Her ankles were lashed to the front legs. Both wrists had been tied to the arms of the chair, but she had managed to free her right hand and to tear off the adhesive tape strapped across her mouth.

It had been done in frantic haste, for her lip was red and swollen.

Brian sprang to her side and began to unfasten her other wrist.

“Smash that thing!” she said, in a shrill, unnatural voice, pointing to the little box. “The *sound* comes from there! Smash it!”

Brian stood upright and, ignoring Nayland Smith, who had a hand on his shoulder, pulled out the police revolver and fired two shots into the flimsy framework.

There came a loud explosion, a crash of glass, splinters flew, and one bullet ricocheted to be buried in the wall beyond. Then the box burst into flames.

Dakin acted promptly. Dashing out to the kitchen, he was back in quick time carrying a big pitcher of water. With this he doused the flaming fragments on the table.

When Brian turned, Lola had fainted.

He carried Lola downstairs, using the kitchen entrance. Dakin came with him to unlock the door of the suite. All the other doors along the corridor

were wide open, and sounds indicated that the search parties were at work, apparently without success.

As Brian laid Lola on the big couch, Dakin said, “She’ll soon pull out of it. She has the heart of a lion. If you have any brandy, I think—” he smiled —“I can leave the patient in your hands. I’ll leave the key, too.”

Dakin retired, closing the outer door. Brian ran to the buffet and was looking for the brandy when he heard Lola’s voice:

“I don’t think I ever fainted in my life before.”

He turned, ran to her. She was sitting up.

“Lola, my dearest!”

“But I do believe a small glass of brandy would do me good.”

Brian ran back, found the brandy, and poured out a liberal shot.

He knelt beside her, his arm around her shoulders as she took the glass. Lola smiled, that fascinating, mocking smile.

“If I drank all this, Brian, I’d faint a second time.”

She took a sip of the brandy, and he drew her to him.

“My lips are sticky from that awful tape,” she protested.

Brian held her very close, but kissed her gently. “I nearly went crazy when I heard you were missing.”

Lola took another sip and then set the glass down. “So you’ve found out about me.” She spoke softly. “You know what a little liar I am!”

“I know you have more grit in your little finger than I have in all my hulking carcass!”

“You mean you forgive me for what I had to do?”

“Forgive you!”

She raised her hand to check him. “Brian dear, go back now, and let me lie here for five minutes. I’ll be perfectly all right when I’ve rested—and cleaned the goo off my face. Then I’ll join you.”

“Leave you here alone! And Fu Manchu—”

“Fu Manchu is too far away to harm me.”

“But we heard his voice!”

“I know you did. He intended you to hear it. But he isn’t there. Go up and see for yourself. I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

And when Brian, torn between his desire to stay with Lola and a burning curiosity, returned to the penthouse, he found the proper entrance door open. Harkness was bending over the cabinet that looked like a radio set, the back

of which had been removed. Nayland Smith was pacing the room and pulling at his ear.

“How is she?” he asked.

“Fine. She’s coming up after a little rest. But where’s Dr. Fu Manchu?”

Sir Denis pointed to an open drawer of the bureau. “There—all we have of him! A tape recorder playing back our conversations in Cairo. If you and I had listened a while longer, we should have heard my voice as well. Brought over for the benefit of my successor. The cunning devil!”

Brian stared about the room incredulously, still half expecting to see the dark spectacles of Dr. Hessian—the only picture he had of the dreaded Fu Manchu—peering out from some shadowy corner.

“But the door! What was the danger of opening the door?”

“The danger’s on the table there,” Harkness called out “Three ordinary bell-pushers were under the carpet where anybody coming in couldn’t miss stepping on one of them.”

“Wired to the receiver you shot to pieces,” Sir Denis added grimly. “If Lola hadn’t lost her head—although God knows I don’t blame her—we might have disconnected them, and so had the secret of the Sound Zone in our hands!”

“Then the other thing”—Brian nodded toward the cabinet—“was connected all the time?”

“It was. One step, and Lola, as well as everyone else and everything breakable in the penthouse, would have gone west. Which reminds me of something you may be able to tell me . . . the French windows. You saw the demonstration. Why weren’t the windows blown out?”

Brian thought hard. He tried to picture this room as he had seen it then, and a memory came.

“I think I can tell you. I remember now that just before Dr. Hessian began to talk, the Japanese lowered what looked like metal shutters over the windows, and then drew those drapes over them.”

“The shutters are still there,” Sir Denis told him. “Couldn’t make out if they were a hotel fixture. Now I know they should be examined. Evidently made of some material nonconductive of the fatal sound.”

Harkness stood up from his examination of the cabinet and lighted a cigarette.

“Fu Manchu planned to leave no evidence, Mr. Merrick,” he remarked. “We found a small, but I guess effective, time bomb inside this thing. Dakin

worked with a bomb-disposal squad in England during the war. He's an expert. He's out in the kitchen fixing it."

"You see, Merrick?" Nayland Smith snapped. "I'm naturally proud of Scotland Yard, but your FBI isn't without merit. What d'you make of that set, Harkness?"

"This is by no means an ordinary radio set, Sir Denis. It's some kind of transmitter. Though what it transmits and where it gets it from are mysteries. We haven't tinkered with it. That's a laboratory job. But Dakin thinks it can convert all sorts of sounds into that one high, inaudible note on which we had a report from Number One. Evidently this note doesn't become dangerous until it has passed through the special receiver."

"It's the receiver that converts the sound," a clear voice explained.

All three turned in a flash. Lola stood there smiling at them. Sir Denis was first with a chair. Lola thanked him and sat down.

"If you feel up to it, Miss Erskine," he said quietly, "perhaps you would explain in more detail."

"I feel up to anything. Particularly, I feel like an idiot for getting hysterical and then passing out. You see, Sir Denis, he"—she seemed to avoid naming Dr. Fu Manchu, as Nayland Smith had known others to do—"was good enough to give me all particulars before leaving me to be shattered. The transmitter, he informed me, is really a sort of selector, or filter. It picks up only certain high notes, vocal or instrumental. On an ordinary receiving set this would come through as atmospheric interferences. It was the thing that Brian blew up that converted the sound to what he called 'the superaural key,' which shatters everything within range." She glanced up as Dakin returned from the kitchen.

"It's harmless now, sir," he reported to Nayland Smith. "We've saved *some* evidence."

Another member of Harkness' party appeared in the doorway.

"What now?" Harkness demanded.

"Doc Alex reports that he's suffering from thundering concussion—but there isn't a single bruise on his head!"

"Who's this?" Brian asked.

"Sergeant Ruppert."

"Sergeant Ruppert! Where did you find him?"

"In the apartment of our next-door neighbors," Nayland Smith told him dryly, "while you were taking care of Miss Erskine." He turned to the man at the door. "Does the doctor think he will recover?"

“He does, sir—and hopes there’ll be no complications.”

“They found a dead man in there, too, Mr. Merrick,” Harkness broke in. “You mightn’t recognize him, the way he looks now. But up till today we all mistook him for Sir Denis.”

“I know. But what about the man in the blue turban?”

“Prince Ranji Bhutani?” Harkness laughed. “He and his servant have vanished, of course. I don’t imagine the ‘prince’ was wearing his blue turban! They must have got away soon after strangling your double, Sir Denis. We had that pair under observation already and there’s a fifty-fifty chance we can pick them up.”

“If Sergeant Ruppert was found there, they evidently got him, too.”

Ray Harkness shook his head. “Four guests on your floor, Mr. Merrick, checked out earlier today. We don’t know if any of them belonged to the gang. Only one, Mrs. Nadia Narovska, has disappeared like the ‘prince’ and left her luggage behind. Said to be a very good-looker.”

“But she may be coming back,” Brian pointed out.

“The manager reports she came in only a few minutes before the elevator was stopped and the Sergeant went on duty at the stair door. How did she get out?”

“But it would be impossible for her to have overpowered a big fellow like that!”

“If she belonged to Dr. Fu Manchu,” Nayland Smith said bitterly, “and she sounds like one of his women, nothing is impossible! I haven’t settled down yet to the fact that that cunning fiend has escaped me again. In my crazy overconfidence I missed my chance. It was my duty to the world when I stood before him to shoot him dead.” He banged his fist into the palm of his left hand. “They all slipped away in whatever time they had between the attack on Ruppert and the time Merrick and I came upstairs. Once they were on street level, New York was open to them. Our hush-hush policy has defeated its own ends. Dr. Fu Manchu can assume many personalities and he probably had a car waiting.”

“It’s not so black as you paint it,” Harkness insisted. “We may have lost the secret of this wonderful air cover, but if the price Uncle Sam had to pay for it was putting our defenses in the hands of Dr. Fu Manchu, we gain more than we lose.”

Nayland Smith forced a smile. “You may be right. Dr. Fu Manchu has still to get out of the country. . . . Oh, Merrick, Miss Erskine has passed through a frightful ordeal. I suggest you take her along for a good dinner. Dine downstairs. I’ll page you when your father arrives. We shall all have

many things to talk about. And I can see you have a lot of things to say to Lola.”

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.

[The end of *Re-enter Fu Manchu* by Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward (as Sax Rohmer)]