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The Return of Dr. Fu-Manchu

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OF DR. FU-MANCHU

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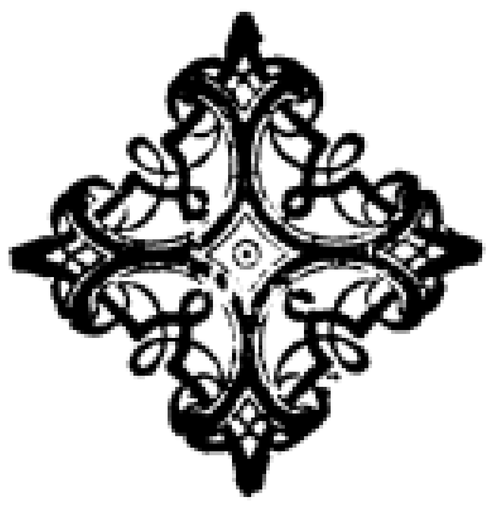
THE RETURN OF DR. FU-MANCHU

By SAX ROHMER

Author of "The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu"
"The Yellow Claw," Etc.



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THE
RETURN OF DR. FU-MANCHU

CHAPTER I

A Midnight Summons

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

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

"Two months ago," I said; "he's a poor correspondent and rather soured, I fancy."

"What — a woman or something?"

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

I placed a whisky and soda before the Rev. J. D. Eltham, also sliding the tobacco jar nearer to his hand. The refined and sensitive face of the clergyman offered no indication of the truculent character of the man. His scanty fair hair, already gray over the temples, was silken and soft-looking; in appearance he was indeed a typical English churchman; but in China he had been known as "the fighting missionary," and had fully deserved the title. In fact, this peaceful-looking gentleman had directly brought about the Boxer Risings!

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"You know," he said, in his clerical voice, but meanwhile stuffing tobacco into an old pipe with fierce energy, "I have often wondered, Petrie — I have never left off wondering —"

"What?"

"That accursed Chinaman! Since the cellar place beneath the site of the burnt-out cottage in Dulwich Village — I have wondered more than ever."

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

"You see," he continued, peering across at me in his oddly nervous way, "one never knows, does one? If I thought that Dr. Fu-Manchu lived; if I seriously suspected that that stupendous intellect, that wonderful genius, Petrie, er —" he hesitated characteristically —"survived, I should feel it my duty —"

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

"If that Satanic genius were not indeed destroyed, then the peace of the world may be threatened anew at any moment!"

He was becoming excited, shooting out his jaw in the truculent manner I knew, and snapping his fingers to emphasize his words; a man composed of the oddest complexities that ever dwelt beneath a clerical frock.

"He may have got back to China, Doctor!" he cried, and his eyes had the fighting glint in them. "Could you rest in peace if you thought that he

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lived? Should you not fear for your life every time that a night-call took you out alone? Why, man alive, it is only two years since he was here among us, since we were searching every shadow for those awful green eyes! What became of his band of assassins — his stranglers, his dacoits, his damnable poisons and insects and what-not — the army of creatures —"

He paused, taking a drink.

"You —" he hesitated diffidently —"searched in Egypt with Nayland Smith, did you not?"

I nodded.

"Contradict me if I am wrong," he continued; "but my impression is that you were searching for the girl — the girl — Kâramanèh, I think she was called?"

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

"You — er — were interested?"

"More than I knew," I replied, "until I realized that I had — lost her."

"I never met Kâramanèh, but from your account, and from others, she was quite unusually —"

"She was very beautiful," I said, and stood up, for I was anxious to terminate that phase of the conversation.

Eltham regarded me sympathetically; he knew something of my search with Nayland Smith for the dark-eyed, Eastern girl who had brought romance into my drab life; he knew that I treasured my mem-

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ories of her as I loathed and abhorred those of the fiendish, brilliant Chinese doctor who had been her master.

Eltham began to pace up and down the rug, his pipe bubbling furiously; and something in the way he carried his head reminded me momentarily of Nayland Smith. Certainly, between this pink-faced clergyman, with his deceptively mild appearance, and the gaunt, bronzed, and steely-eyed Burmese commissioner, there was externally little in common; but it was some little nervous trick in his carriage that conjured up through the smoky haze one distant summer evening when Smith had paced that very room as Eltham paced it now, when before my startled eyes he had rung up the curtain upon the savage drama in which, though I little suspected it then, Fate had cast me for a leading rôle.

I wondered if Eltham's thoughts ran parallel with mine. My own were centered upon the unforgettable figure of the murderous Chinaman. These words, exactly as Smith had used them, seemed once again to sound in my ears: "Imagine a person tall, lean, and feline, high shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long magnetic eyes of the true cat green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science, past and present, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the 'Yellow Peril' incarnate in one man."

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This visit of Eltham's no doubt was responsible for my mood; for this singular clergyman had played his part in the drama of two years ago.

"I should like to see Smith again," he said suddenly; "it seems a pity that a man like that should be buried in Burma. Burma makes a mess of the best of men, Doctor. You said he was not married?"

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

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

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

"Quite so — quite so! And, you know, Doctor, neither am I; but"— he was growing painfully embarrassed —"it may be your due — I — er — I have a correspondent, in the interior of China —"

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

"Well, I would not desire to raise — vain hopes — nor to occasion, shall I say, empty fears; but — er . . . no, Doctor!" He flushed like a girl —"It was wrong of me to open this conversation. Perhaps, when I know more — will you forget my words, for the time?"

The telephone bell rang.

"Hullo!" cried Eltham —"hard luck, Doctor!" — but I could see that he welcomed the interruption. "Why!" he added, "it is one o'clock!"

I went to the telephone.

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

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"Yes; who is speaking?"

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

"Certainly," I replied, for Mrs. Hewett was not only a profitable patient but an estimable lady—"I shall be with you in a quarter of an hour."

I hung up the receiver.

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

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

"I should much prefer to walk over with you, if it would not be intruding. Our conversation has ill prepared me for sleep."

"Right!" I said; for I welcomed his company; and three minutes later we were striding across the deserted common.

A sort of mist floated amongst the trees, seeming in the moonlight like a veil draped from trunk to trunk, as in silence we passed the Mound pond, and struck out for the north side of the common.

I suppose the presence of Eltham and the irritating recollection of his half-confidence were the responsible factors, but my mind persistently dwelt upon the subject of Fu-Manchu and the atrocities which he had committed during his sojourn in England. So actively was my imagination at work that I felt again the menace which so long had hung over me; I felt as though that murderous yellow cloud still cast its shadow upon England. And I found myself longing for the company of Nayland Smith. I cannot

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state what was the nature of Eltham's reflections, but I can guess; for he was as silent as I.

It was with a conscious effort that I shook myself out of this morbidly reflective mood, on finding that we had crossed the common and were come to the abode of my patient.

"I shall take a little walk," announced Eltham; "for I gather that you don't expect to be detained long? I shall never be out of sight of the door, of course."

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

There were no lights to be seen in any of the windows, which circumstance rather surprised me, as my patient occupied, or had occupied when last I had visited her, a first-floor bedroom in the front of the house. My knocking and ringing produced no response for three or four minutes; then, as I persisted, a scantily clothed and half awake maid servant unbarred the door and stared at me stupidly in the moonlight.

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

The girl stared more stupidly than ever.

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

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

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

For a few moments I stood there, staring as foolishly as she; then abruptly I turned and descended

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the steps. At the gate I stood looking up and down the road. The houses were all in darkness. What could be the meaning of the mysterious summons? I had made no mistake respecting the name of my patient; it had been twice repeated over the telephone; yet that the call had not emanated from Mrs. Hewett's house was now palpably evident. Days had been when I should have regarded the episode as preluding some outrage, but to-night I felt more disposed to ascribe it to a silly practical joke.

Eltham walked up briskly.

"You're in demand to-night, Doctor," he said. "A young person called for you almost directly you had left your house, and, learning where you were gone, followed you."

"Indeed!" I said, a trifle incredulously. "There are plenty of other doctors if the case is an urgent one."

"She may have thought it would save time as you were actually up and dressed," explained Eltham; "and the house is quite near to here, I understand."

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

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

"But I feel certain," declared Eltham, earnestly, "that this is genuine! The poor girl was dreadfully agitated; her master has broken his leg and is lying helpless: number 280, Rectory Grove."

"Where is the girl?" I asked, sharply.

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

"Was she a servant?"

"I should imagine so: French, I think. But she was so wrapped up I had little more than a glimpse of her. I am sorry to hear that some one has played a silly joke on you, but believe me —" he was very earnest —"this is no jest. The poor girl could scarcely speak for sobs. She mistook me for you, of course."

"Oh!" said I grimly; "well, I suppose I must go. Broken leg, you said? — and my surgical bag, splints and so forth, are at home!"

"My dear Petrie!" cried Eltham, in his enthusiastic way —"you no doubt can do something to alleviate the poor man's suffering immediately. I will run back to your rooms for the bag and rejoin you at 280, Rectory Grove."

"It's awfully good of you, Eltham —"

He held up his hand.

"The call of suffering humanity, Petrie, is one which I may no more refuse to hear than you."

I made no further protest after that, for his point of view was evident and his determination adamant, but told him where he would find the bag and once more set out across the moonbright common, he pursuing a westerly direction and I going east.

Some three hundred yards I had gone, I suppose, and my brain had been very active the while, when something occurred to me which placed a new com-

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plexion upon this second summons. I thought of the falsity of the first, of the improbability of even the most hardened practical joker practising his wiles at one o'clock in the morning. I thought of our recent conversation; above all I thought of the girl who had delivered the message to Eltham, the girl whom he had described as a French maid — whose personal charm had so completely enlisted his sympathies. Now, to this train of thought came a new one, and, adding it, my suspicion became almost a certainty.

I remembered (as, knowing the district, I should have remembered before) that there was no number 280 in Rectory Grove.

Pulling up sharply I stood looking about me. Not a living soul was in sight; not even a policeman. Where the lamps marked the main paths across the common nothing moved; in the shadows about me nothing stirred. But something stirred within me — a warning voice which for long had lain dormant.

What was afoot?

A breeze caressed the leaves overhead, breaking the silence with mysterious whisperings. Some portentous truth was seeking for admittance to my brain. I strove to reassure myself, but the sense of impending evil and of mystery became heavier. At last I could combat my strange fears no longer. I turned and began to run toward the south side of the common — toward my rooms — and after Eltham.

I had hoped to head him off, but came upon no sign of him. An all-night tramcar passed at the

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moment that I reached the high road, and as I ran around behind it I saw that my windows were lighted and that there was a light in the hall.

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

"There's a gentleman just come, Doctor," she began —

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

Standing by the writing-table was a tall, thin man, his gaunt face brown as a coffee-berry and his steely gray eyes fixed upon me. My heart gave a great leap — and seemed to stand still.

It was Nayland Smith!

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

He wrung my hand hard, looking at me with his searching eyes; but there was little enough of gladness in his face. He was altogether grayer than when last I had seen him — grayer and sterner.

"Where is Eltham?" I asked.

Smith started back as though I had struck him.

"Eltham!" he whispered —"*Eltham!* is Eltham here?"

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

Smith dashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand and his eyes gleamed almost wildly.

"My God, Petrie!" he said, "am I fated *always* to come too late?"

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My dreadful fears in that instant were confirmed. I seemed to feel my legs totter beneath me.

"Smith, you don't mean —"

"I do, Petrie!" His voice sounded very far away. "Fu-Manchu is here; and Eltham, God help him . . . is his first victim!"

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CHAPTER II

ELTHAM VANISHES

SMITH went racing down the stairs like a man possessed. Heavy with such a foreboding of calamity as I had not known for two years, I followed him — along the hall and out into the road. The very peace and beauty of the night in some way increased my mental agitation. The sky was lighted almost tropically with such a blaze of stars as I could not recall to have seen since, my futile search concluded, I had left Egypt. The glory of the moonlight yellowed the lamps speckled across the expanse of the common. The night was as still as night can ever be in London. The dimming pulse of a cab or car alone disturbed the stillness.

With a quick glance to right and left, Smith ran across on to the common, and, leaving the door wide open behind me, I followed. The path which Eltham had pursued terminated almost opposite to my house. One's gaze might follow it, white and empty, for several hundred yards past the pond, and further, until it became overshadowed and was lost amid a clump of trees.

I came up with Smith, and side by side we ran on, whilst pantingly, I told my tale.

"It was a trick to get you away from him!" cried

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Smith. "They meant no doubt to make some attempt at your house, but as he came out with you, an alternative plan —"

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

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

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

"You see that clump of bushes on the other side of the road?" I said. "There's a path to the left of it. I took that path and he took this. We parted at the point where they meet —"

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

What he hoped to find there I could not imagine. Whatever it had been he was disappointed, and he turned to me again, frowning perplexedly, and tugging at the lobe of his left ear, an old trick which reminded me of gruesome things we had lived through in the past.

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

From the tone of his voice I knew that he was tensed up nervously, and his mood but added to the apprehension of my own.

"*What* may be amongst the trees, Smith?" I asked.

He walked on.

"God knows, Petrie; but I fear —"

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Behind us, along the highroad, a tramcar went rocking by, doubtless bearing a few belated workers homeward. The stark incongruity of the thing was appalling. How little those weary toilers, hemmed about with the commonplace, suspected that almost within sight from the car windows, in a place of prosy benches, iron railings, and unromantic, flickering lamps, two fellow men moved upon the border of a horror-land!

Beneath the trees a shadow carpet lay, its edges tropically sharp; and fully ten yards from the first of the group, we two, hatless both, and sharing a common dread, paused for a moment and listened.

The car had stopped at the further extremity of the common, and now with a moan that grew to a shriek was rolling on its way again. We stood and listened until silence reclaimed the night. Not a footstep could be heard. Then slowly we walked on. At the edge of the little coppice we stopped again abruptly.

Smith turned and thrust his pistol into my hand. A white ray of light pierced the shadows; my companion carried an electric torch. But no trace of Eltham was discoverable.

There had been a heavy shower of rain during the evening just before sunset, and although the open paths were dry again, under the trees the ground was still moist. Ten yards within the coppice we came upon tracks — the tracks of one running, as the deep imprints of the toes indicated.

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Abruptly the tracks terminated; others, softer, joined them, two sets converging from left and right. There was a confused patch, trailing off to the west; then this became indistinct, and was finally lost, upon the hard ground outside the group.

For perhaps a minute, or more, we ran about from tree to tree, and from bush to bush, searching like hounds for a scent, and fearful of what we might find. We found nothing; and fully in the moonlight we stood facing one another. The night was profoundly still.

Nayland Smith stepped back into the shadows, and began slowly to turn his head from left to right, taking in the entire visible expanse of the common. Toward a point where the road bisected it he stared intently. Then, with a bound, he set off.

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

Vaulting a railing he went away over a field like a madman. Recovering from the shock of surprise, I followed him, but he was well ahead of me, and making for some vaguely seen object moving against the lights of the roadway.

Another railing was vaulted, and the corner of a second, triangular grass patch crossed at a hot sprint. We were twenty yards from the road when the sound of a starting motor broke the silence. We gained the graveled footpath only to see the tail-light of the car dwindling to the north!

Smith leaned dizzily against a tree.

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"Eltham is in that car!" he gasped. "Just God! are we to stand here and see him taken away to —"

He beat his fist upon the tree, in a sort of tragic despair. The nearest cab-rank was no great distance away, but, excluding the possibility of no cab being there, it might, for all practical purposes, as well have been a mile off.

The beat of the retreating motor was scarcely audible; the lights might but just be distinguished. Then, coming in an opposite direction, appeared the headlamp of another car, of a car that raced nearer and nearer to us, so that, within a few seconds of its first appearance, we found ourselves bathed in the beam of its headlights.

Smith bounded out into the road, and stood, a weird silhouette, with upraised arms, fully in its course!

The brakes were applied hurriedly. It was a big limousine, and its driver swerved perilously in avoiding Smith and nearly ran into me. But, the breathless moment past, the car was pulled up, head on to the railings; and a man in evening clothes was demanding excitedly what had happened. Smith, a hatless, disheveled figure, stepped up to the door.

"My name is Nayland Smith," he said rapidly — "Burmese Commissioner." He snatched a letter from his pocket and thrust it into the hands of the bewildered man. "Read that. It is signed by another Commissioner — the Commissioner of Police."

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With amazement written all over him, the other obeyed.

"You see," continued my friend, tersely—"it is *carte blanche*. I wish to commandeer your car, sir, on a matter of life and death!"

The other returned the letter.

"Allow me to offer it!" he said, descending. "My man will take your orders. I can finish my journey by cab. I am—"

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

"Quick!" he cried to the stupefied chauffeur—"You passed a car a minute ago—yonder. Can you overtake it?"

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

Smith leaped in, pulling me after him.

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

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

One last glimpse I had of the man we had dispossessed, standing alone by the roadside, and at ever increasing speed, we leaped away in the track of Eltham's captors.

Smith was too highly excited for ordinary conversation, but he threw out short, staccato remarks.

"I have followed Fu-Manchu from Hongkong," he jerked. "Lost him at Suez. He got here a boat ahead of me. Eltham has been corresponding with some mandarin up-country. Knew that.

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Came straight to you. Only got in this evening. He — Fu-Manchu — has been sent here to get Eltham. My God! and he has him! He will question him! The interior of China — a seething pot, Petrie! They had to stop the leakage of information. *He* is here for that."

The car pulled up with a jerk that pitched me out of my seat, and the chauffeur leaped to the road and ran ahead. Smith was out in a trice, as the man, who had run up to a constable, came racing back.

"Jump in, sir — jump in!" he cried, his eyes bright with the lust of the chase; "they are making for Battersea!"

And we were off again.

Through the empty streets we roared on. A place of gasometers and desolate waste lots slipped behind and we were in a narrow way where gates of yards and a few lowly houses faced upon a prospect of high blank wall.

"Thames on our right," said Smith, peering ahead. "His rathole is by the river as usual. *Hi!*"— he grabbed up the speaking-tube —"Stop! Stop!"

The limousine swung in to the narrow sidewalk, and pulled up close by a yard gate. I, too, had seen our quarry — a long, low bodied car, showing no inside lights. It had turned the next corner, where a street lamp shone greenly, not a hundred yards ahead.

Smith leaped out, and I followed him.

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"That must be a *cul de sac,*" he said, and turned to the eager-eyed chauffeur. "Run back to that last turning," he ordered, "and wait there, out of sight. Bring the car up when you hear a police-whistle."

The man looked disappointed, but did not question the order. As he began to back away, Smith grasped me by the arm and drew me forward.

"We must get to that corner," he said, "and see where the car stands, without showing ourselves."

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CHAPTER III

The Wire Jacket

I SUPPOSE we were not more than a dozen paces from the lamp when we heard the thudding of the motor. The car was backing out!

It was a desperate moment, for it seemed that we could not fail to be discovered. Nayland Smith began to look about him, feverishly, for a hiding-place, a quest in which I seconded with equal anxiety. And Fate was kind to us — doubly kind as after events revealed. A wooden gate broke the expanse of wall hard by upon the right, and, as the result of some recent accident, a ragged gap had been torn in the panels close to the top.

The chain of the padlock hung loosely; and in a second Smith was up, with his foot in this as in a stirrup. He threw his arm over the top and drew himself upright. A second later he was astride the broken gate.

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

I got my foot into the loop of chain, grasped at a projection in the gatepost and found myself up.

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

He climbed over and vanished in the darkness. I

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was still astride the broken gate when the car turned the corner, slowly, for there was scanty room; but I was standing upon the bar on the inside and had my head below the gap ere the driver could possibly have seen me.

"Stay where you are until he passes," hissed my companion, below. "There is a row of kegs under you."

The sound of the motor passing outside grew loud — louder — then began to die away. I felt about with my left foot; discerned the top of a keg, and dropped, panting, beside Smith.

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

"That we have followed the right car?" he interrupted. "Ask yourself the question: what would any ordinary man be doing motoring in a place like this at two o'clock in the morning?"

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

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

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

Beyond a great expanse of unbroken darkness a ray of moonlight slanted into the place wherein we stood, spilling its cold radiance upon rows of kegs.

"That's another door," continued my friend — I now began dimly to perceive him beside me. "If my calculations are not entirely wrong, it opens on a wharf gate —"

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

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

He directed the light of the electric torch upon a narrow path through the ranks of casks, and led the way to the further door. A good two feet of moonlight showed along the top. I heard Smith straining; then —

"These kegs are all loaded with grease!" he said —"and I want to reconnoiter over that door."

"I am leaning on a crate which seems easy to move," I reported. "Yes, it's empty. Lend a hand."

We grasped the empty crate, and between us, set it up on a solid pedestal of casks. Then Smith mounted to this observation platform and I scrambled up beside him, and looked down upon the lane outside.

It terminated as Smith had foreseen at a wharf gate some six feet to the right of our post. Piled up in the lane beneath us, against the warehouse door, was a stack of empty casks. Beyond, over the way, was a kind of ramshackle building that had possibly been a dwelling-house at some time. Bills were stuck in the ground-floor window indicating that the three floors were to let as offices; so much was discernible in that reflected moonlight.

I could hear the tide lapping upon the wharf, could feel the chill from the river and hear the vague

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noises which, night nor day, never cease upon the great commercial waterway.

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

I obeyed, clutching at him for support; for I was suddenly dizzy, and my heart was leaping wildly — furiously.

"You saw her?" he whispered.

Saw her! yes, I had seen her! And my poor dream-world was toppling about me, its cities, ashes and its fairness, dust.

Peering from the window, her great eyes wondrous in the moonlight and her red lips parted, hair gleaming like burnished foam and her anxious gaze set upon the corner of the lane — was Kâramanèh . . . Kâramanèh whom once we had rescued from the house of this fiendish Chinese doctor; Kâramanèh who had been our ally; in fruitless quest of whom,— when, too late, I realized how empty my life was become — I had wasted what little of the world's goods I possessed; — Kâramanèh!

"Poor old Petrie," murmured Smith —"I knew, but I hadn't the heart — *He* has her again — God knows by what chains he holds her. But she's only a woman, old boy, and women are very much alike — very much alike from Charing Cross to Pagoda Road."

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a moment; I am ashamed to confess that I was trembling; then,

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clenching my teeth with that mechanical physical effort which often accompanies a mental one, I swallowed the bitter draught of Nayland Smith's philosophy. He was raising himself, to peer, cautiously, over the top of the door. I did likewise.

The window from which the girl had looked was nearly on a level with our eyes, and as I raised my head above the woodwork, I quite distinctly saw her go out of the room. The door, as she opened it, admitted a dull light, against which her figure showed silhouetted for a moment. Then the door was reclosed.

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

Before I had grasped the nature of his plan he was over and had dropped almost noiselessly upon the casks outside. Again I followed his lead.

"You are not going to attempt anything, single-handed — against *him?*" I asked.

"Petrie — Eltham is in that house. He has been brought here to be put to the question, in the medieval, and Chinese, sense! Is there time to summon assistance?"

I shuddered. This had been in my mind, certainly, but so expressed it was definitely horrible — revolting, yet stimulating.

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

He walked across the tops of the casks and leaped down, pointing to that nearest to the closed door of

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the house. I helped him place it under the open window. A second we set beside it, and, not without some noise, got a third on top.

Smith mounted.

His jaw muscles were very prominent and his eyes shone like steel; but he was as cool as though he were about to enter a theater and not the den of the most stupendous genius who ever worked for evil. I would forgive any man who, knowing Dr. Fu-Manchu, feared him; I feared him myself — feared him as one fears a scorpion; but when Nayland Smith hauled himself up on the wooden ledge above the door and swung thence into the darkened room, I followed and was in close upon his heels. But I admired him, for he had every ampère of his self-possession in hand; my own case was different.

He spoke close to my ear.

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

I thought of Kâramanèh, of lovely dark-eyed Kâramanèh, whom this wonderful, evil product of secret China had stolen from me — for so I now adjudged it.

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

The words ceased — frozen on my tongue.

There are things that one seeks to forget, but it is my lot often to remember the sound which at that moment literally struck me rigid with horror. Yet it was only a groan; but, merciful God! I pray that it may never be my lot to listen to such a groan again.

Smith drew a sibilant breath.

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

"No, no!" screamed a woman's voice — a voice that thrilled me anew, but with another emotion — "Not that, not —"

I distinctly heard the sound of a blow. Followed a sort of vague scuffling. A door somewhere at the back of the house opened — and shut again. Some one was coming along the passage toward us!

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

Nearer came the footsteps and nearer. I could hear suppressed sobs. The door opened, admitting again the faint light — and Kâramanèh came in. The place was quite unfurnished, offering no possibility of hiding; but to hide was unnecessary.

Her slim figure had not crossed the threshold ere Smith had his arm about the girl's waist and one hand clapped to her mouth. A stifled gasp she uttered, and he lifted her into the room.

I stepped forward and closed the door. A faint perfume stole to my nostrils — a vague, elusive breath of the East, reminiscent of strange days that, now, seemed to belong to a remote past. Kâramanèh! that faint, indefinable perfume was part of her dainty personality; it may appear absurd — impossible — but many and many a time I had dreamt of it.

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

I bent over the girl as he held her. She was quite

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still, but I could have wished that I had had more certain mastery of myself. I took the torch from Smith's pocket, and, mechanically, directed it upon the captive.

She was dressed very plainly, wearing a simple blue skirt, and white blouse. It was easy to divine that it was she whom Eltham had mistaken for a French maid. A brooch set with a ruby was pinned at the point where the blouse opened — gleaming fierily and harshly against the soft skin. Her face was pale and her eyes wide with fear.

"There is some cord in my right-hand pocket," said Smith; "I came provided. Tie her wrists."

I obeyed him, silently. The girl offered no resistance, but I think I never essayed a less congenial task than that of binding her white wrists. The jeweled fingers lay quite listlessly in my own.

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

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

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

Smith removed his hand from her mouth but did not relax his grip of her. She looked up at me with eyes in which I could have sworn there was no recognition. But a flush momentarily swept over her face, and left it pale again.

"We shall have to — gag her —"

"Smith, I can't do it!"

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

"Please don't be cruel to me," she whispered, with that soft accent which always played havoc with my composure. "Every one — every one — is cruel to me. I will promise — indeed I will swear, to be quiet. Oh, believe me, if you can save him I will do nothing to hinder you." Her beautiful head drooped. "Have some pity for me as well."

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

She started violently.

"You know my name!" Her voice was barely audible. "Yet I have never seen you in my life —"

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

Dazed by the apparent sincerity in the voice of our lovely captive — vacant from wonder of it all — I opened the door, felt for, and found, a key.

We left Kâramanèh crouching against the wall; her great eyes were turned towards me fascinatedly. Smith locked the door with much care. We began a tip-toed progress along the dimly lighted passage.

From beneath a door on the left, and near the end, a brighter light shone. Beyond that again was another door. A voice was speaking in the lighted room; yet I could have sworn that Kâramanèh had come, not from there but from the room beyond — from the far end of the passage.

But the voice! — who, having once heard it, could

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ever mistake that singular voice, alternately guttural and sibilant!

Dr. Fu-Manchu was speaking!

"I have asked you," came with ever-increasing clearness (Smith had begun to turn the knob), "to reveal to me the name of your correspondent in Nan-Yang. I have suggested that he may be the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat, but you have declined to confirm me. Yet I know" (Smith had the door open a good three inches and was peering in) "that some official, some high official, is a traitor. Am I to resort again to *the question* to learn his name?"

Ice seemed to enter my veins at the unseen inquisitor's intonation of the words "*the question.*" This was the Twentieth Century, yet there, in that damnable room . . .

Smith threw the door open.

Through a sort of haze, born mostly of horror, but not entirely, I saw Eltham, stripped to the waist and tied, with his arms upstretched, to a rafter in the ancient ceiling. A Chinaman who wore a slop-shop blue suit and who held an open knife in his hand, stood beside him. Eltham was ghastly white. The appearance of his chest puzzled me momentarily, then I realized that a sort of *tourniquet* of wire-netting was screwed so tightly about him that the flesh swelled out in knobs through the mesh. There was blood —

"God in heaven!" screamed Smith frenziedly — "*they have the wire-jacket on him!* Shoot down

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that damned Chinaman, Petrie! Shoot! Shoot!"

Lithely as a cat the man with the knife leaped around — but I raised the Browning, and deliberately — with a cool deliberation that came to me suddenly — shot him through the head. I saw his oblique eyes turn up to the whites; I saw the mark squarely between his brows; and with no word nor cry he sank to his knees and toppled forward with one yellow hand beneath him and one outstretched, clutching — clutching — convulsively. His pigtail came unfastened and began to uncoil, slowly, like a snake.

I handed the pistol to Smith; I was perfectly cool, now; and I leaped forward, took up the bloody knife from the floor and cut Eltham's lashings. He sank into my arms.

"Praise God," he murmured, weakly. "He is more merciful to me than perhaps I deserve. Unscrew . . . the jacket, Petrie . . . I think . . . I was very near to . . . weakening. Praise the good God, Who . . . gave me . . . fortitude . . ."

I got the screw of the accursed thing loosened, but the act of removing the jacket was too agonizing for Eltham — man of iron though he was. I laid him swooning on the floor.

"Where is Fu-Manchu?"

Nayland Smith, from just within the door, threw out the query in a tone of stark amaze. I stood up — I could do nothing more for the poor victim at the moment — and looked about me.

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The room was innocent of furniture, save for heaps of rubbish on the floor, and a tin oil-lamp hung on the wall. The dead Chinaman lay close beside Smith. There was no second door, the one window was barred, and from this room we had heard the voice, the unmistakable, unforgettable voice, of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

But Dr. Fu-Manchu was not there!

Neither of us could accept the fact for a moment; we stood there, looking from the dead man to the tortured man who only swooned, in a state of helpless incredulity.

Then the explanation flashed upon us both, simultaneously, and with a cry of baffled rage Smith leaped along the passage to the second door. It was wide open. I stood at his elbow when he swept its emptiness with the ray of his pocket-lamp.

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

Smith literally ground his teeth.

"Yet, Petrie," he said, "we have learnt something. Fu-Manchu had evidently promised Eltham his life if he would divulge the name of his correspondent. He meant to keep his word; it is a sidelight on his character."

"How so?"

"Eltham has never seen Dr. Fu-Manchu, but Eltham knows certain parts of China better than you know the Strand. Probably, if he saw Fu-Manchu,

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he would recognize him for whom he really is, and this, it seems, the Doctor is anxious to avoid."

We ran back to where we had left Kâramanèh.

The room was empty!

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

He leaned from the window and the skirl of a police whistle split the stillness of the night.

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CHAPTER IV

The Cry of a Nighthawk

SUCH were the episodes that marked the coming of Dr. Fu-Manchu to London, that awakened fears long dormant and reopened old wounds — nay, poured poison into them. I strove desperately, by close attention to my professional duties, to banish the very memory of Kâramanèh from my mind; desperately, but how vainly! Peace was for me no more, joy was gone from the world, and only mockery remained as my portion.

Poor Eltham we had placed in a nursing establishment, where his indescribable hurts could be properly tended: and his uncomplaining fortitude not infrequently made me thoroughly ashamed of myself. Needless to say, Smith had made such other arrangements as were necessary to safeguard the injured man, and these proved so successful that the malignant being whose plans they thwarted abandoned his designs upon the heroic clergyman and directed his attention elsewhere, as I must now proceed to relate.

Dusk always brought with it a cloud of apprehensions, for darkness must ever be the ally of crime; and it was one night, long after the clocks had struck the

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mystic hour "when churchyards yawn," that the hand of Dr. Fu-Manchu again stretched out to grasp a victim. I was dismissing a chance patient.

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

"Good night, Mr. Forsyth," I replied; and, having conducted my late visitor to the door, I closed and bolted it, switched off the light and went upstairs.

My patient was chief officer of one of the P. and O. boats. He had cut his hand rather badly on the homeward run, and signs of poisoning having developed, had called to have the wound treated, apologizing for troubling me at so late an hour, but explaining that he had only just come from the docks. The hall clock announced the hour of one as I ascended the stairs. I found myself wondering what there was in Mr. Forsyth's appearance which excited some vague and elusive memory. Coming to the top floor, I opened the door of a front bedroom and was surprised to find the interior in darkness.

"Smith!" I called.

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

Nayland Smith was sitting in the dark at the open window and peering out across the common. Even as I saw him, a dim silhouette, I could detect that tensity in his attitude which told of high-strung nerves.

I joined him.

"What is it?" I said, curiously.

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

His masterful voice had the dry tone in it betoken-

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ing excitement. I leaned on the ledge beside him and looked out. The blaze of stars almost compensated for the absence of the moon and the night had a quality of stillness that made for awe. This was a tropical summer, and the common, with its dancing lights dotted irregularly about it, had an unfamiliar look to-night. The clump of nine elms showed as a dense and irregular mass, lacking detail.

Such moods as that which now claimed my friend are magnetic. I had no thought of the night's beauty, for it only served to remind me that somewhere amid London's millions was lurking an uncanny being, whose life was a mystery, whose very existence was a scientific miracle.

"Where's your patient?" rapped Smith.

His abrupt query diverted my thoughts into a new channel. No footstep disturbed the silence of the highroad; where *was* my patient?

I craned from the window. Smith grabbed my arm.

"Don't lean out," he said.

I drew back, glancing at him surprisedly.

"For Heaven's sake, why not?"

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

"I did, and I can't make out what he is doing. He seems to have remained standing at the gate for some reason."

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

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His hand remained upon my arm, gripping it nervously. Shall I say that I was surprised? I can say it with truth. But I shall add that I was thrilled, eerily; for this subdued excitement and alert watching of Smith could only mean one thing:

Fu-Manchu!

And that was enough to set me watching as keenly as he; to set me listening; not only for sounds outside the house but for sounds within. Doubts, suspicions, dreads, heaped themselves up in my mind. Why was Forsyth standing there at the gate? I had never seen him before, to my knowledge, yet there was something oddly reminiscent about the man. Could it be that his visit formed part of a plot? Yet his wound had been genuine enough. Thus my mind worked, feverishly; such was the effect of an unspoken thought — Fu-Manchu.

Nayland Smith's grip tightened on my arm.

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

His words were wholly unnecessary. I, too, had seen it; a wonderful and uncanny sight. Out of the darkness under the elms, low down upon the ground, grew a vaporous blue light. It flared up, elfinish, then began to ascend. Like an igneous phantom, a witch flame, it rose, high — higher — higher, to what I adjudged to be some twelve feet or more from the ground. Then, high in the air, it died away again as it had come!

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

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

He paused. Rapid footsteps sounded below. Over Smith's shoulder I saw Forsyth cross the road, climb the low rail, and set out across the common.

Smith sprang impetuously to his feet.

"We must stop him!" he said hoarsely; then, clapping a hand to my mouth as I was about to call out —"Not a sound, Petrie!"

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

"Out through the garden — the side entrance!"

I overtook him as he threw wide the door of my dispensing room. Through it he ran and opened the door at the other end. I followed him out, closing it behind me. The smell from some tobacco plants in a neighboring flower-bed was faintly perceptible; no breeze stirred; and in the great silence I could hear Smith, in front of me, tugging at the bolt of the gate.

Then he had it open, and I stepped out, close on his heels, and left the door ajar.

"We must not appear to have come from your house," explained Smith rapidly. "I will go along the highroad and cross to the common a hundred yards up, where there is a pathway, as though homeward bound to the north side. Give me half a minute's start, then you proceed in an opposite direction and cross from the corner of the next road. Directly you are out of the light of the street lamps, get over the rails and run for the elms!"

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He thrust a pistol into my hand and was off.

While he had been with me, speaking in that incisive, impetuous way of his, with his dark face close to mine, and his eyes gleaming like steel, I had been at one with him in his feverish mood, but now, when I stood alone, in that staid and respectable byway, holding a loaded pistol in my hand, the whole thing became utterly unreal.

It was in an odd frame of mind that I walked to the next corner, as directed; for I was thinking, not of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the great and evil man who dreamed of Europe and America under Chinese rule, not of Nayland Smith, who alone stood between the Chinaman and the realization of his monstrous schemes, not even of Kâramanèh, the slave girl, whose glorious beauty was a weapon of might in Fu-Manchu's hand, but of what impression I must have made upon a patient had I encountered one then.

Such were my ideas up to the moment that I crossed to the common and vaulted into the field on my right. As I began to run toward the elms I found myself wondering what it was all about, and for what we were come. Fifty yards west of the trees it occurred to me that if Smith had counted on cutting Forsyth off we were too late, for it appeared to me that he must already be in the coppice.

I was right. Twenty paces more I ran, and ahead of me, from the elms, came a sound. Clearly it came through the still air — the eerie hoot of a nighthawk.

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I could not recall ever to have heard the cry of that bird on the common before, but oddly enough I attached little significance to it until, in the ensuing instant, a most dreadful scream — a scream in which fear, and loathing, and anger were hideously blended — thrilled me with horror.

After that I have no recollection of anything until I found myself standing by the southernmost elm.

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

As if in answer to my cry came an indescribable sound, a mingled sobbing and choking. Out from the shadows staggered a ghastly figure — that of a man whose face appeared to be *streaked*. His eyes glared at me madly and he mowed the air with his hands like one blind and insane with fear.

I started back; words died upon my tongue. The figure reeled and the man fell babbling and sobbing at my very feet.

Inert I stood, looking down at him. He writhed a moment — and was still. The silence again became perfect. Then, from somewhere beyond the elms, Nayland Smith appeared. I did not move. Even when he stood beside me, I merely stared at him fatuously.

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

The words aroused me.

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

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"So did some one else," he rapped. "Our poor sailor has met the end designed for *me*, Petrie!"

At that I realized two things: I knew why Forsyth's face had struck me as being familiar in some puzzling way, and I knew why Forsyth now lay dead upon the grass. Save that he was a fair man and wore a slight mustache, he was, in features and build, the double of Nayland Smith!

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CHAPTER V

The Net

WE raised the poor victim and turned him over on his back. I dropped upon my knees, and with unsteady fingers began to strike a match. A slight breeze was arising and sighing gently through the elms, but, screened by my hands, the flame of the match took life. It illuminated wanly the sun-baked face of Nayland Smith, his eyes gleaming with unnatural brightness. I bent forward, and the dying light of the match touched that other face.

"Oh, God!" whispered Smith.

A faint puff of wind extinguished the match.

In all my surgical experience I had never met with anything quite so horrible. Forsyth's livid face was streaked with tiny streams of blood, which proceeded from a series of irregular wounds. One group of these clustered upon his left temple, another beneath his right eye, and others extended from the chin down to the throat. They were black, almost like tattoo marks, and the entire injured surface was bloated indescribably. His fists were clenched; he was quite rigid.

Smith's piercing eyes were set upon me eloquently as I knelt on the path and made my examination —

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an examination which that first glimpse when Forsyth came staggering out from the trees had rendered useless — a mere matter of form.

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

Smith began beating his fist into his left palm and taking little, short, nervous strides up and down beside the dead man. I could hear a car humming along the highroad, but I remained there on my knees staring dully at the disfigured bloody face which but a matter of minutes since had been that of a clean-looking British seaman. I found myself contrasting his neat, squarely trimmed mustache with the bloated face above it, and counting the little drops of blood which trembled upon its edge. There were footsteps approaching. I stood up. The footsteps quickened; and I turned as a constable ran up.

"What's this?" he demanded gruffly, and stood with his fists clenched, looking from Smith to me and down at that which lay between us. Then his hand flew to his breast; there was a silvern gleam and —

"Drop that whistle!" snapped Smith — and struck it from the man's hand. "Where's your lantern? Don't ask questions!"

The constable started back and was evidently debating upon his chances with the two of us, when my friend pulled a letter from his pocket and thrust it under the man's nose.

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

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There was something in his voice which changed the officer's opinion of the situation. He directed the light of his lantern upon the open letter and seemed to be stricken with wonder.

"If you have any doubts," continued Smith — "you may not be familiar with the Commissioner's signature — you have only to ring up Scotland Yard from Dr. Petrie's house, to which we shall now return, to disperse them." He pointed to Forsyth. "Help us to carry him there. We must not be seen; this must be hushed up. You understand? It must not get into the press —"

The man saluted respectfully; and the three of us addressed ourselves to the mournful task. By slow stages we bore the dead man to the edge of the common, carried him across the road and into my house, without exciting attention even on the part of those vagrants who nightly slept out in the neighborhood.

We laid our burden upon the surgery table.

"You will want to make an examination, Petrie," said Smith in his decisive way, "and the officer here might 'phone for the ambulance. I have some investigations to make also. I must have the pocket lamp."

He raced upstairs to his room, and an instant later came running down again. The front door banged.

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

"Thank you, sir."

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He went out of the surgery as I switched on the lamp over the table and began to examine the marks upon Forsyth's skin. These, as I have said, were in groups and nearly all in the form of elongated punctures; a fairly deep incision with a pear-shaped and superficial scratch beneath it. One of the tiny wounds had penetrated the right eye.

The symptoms, or those which I had been enabled to observe as Forsyth had first staggered into view from among the elms, were most puzzling. Clearly enough, the muscles of articulation and the respiratory muscles had been affected; and now the livid face, dotted over with tiny wounds (they were also on the throat), set me mentally groping for a clue to the manner of his death.

No clue presented itself; and my detailed examination of the body availed me nothing. The gray herald of dawn was come when the police arrived with the ambulance and took Forsyth away.

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

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

He stood there in the gray light of the hallway, tugging at the lobe of his left ear — an old trick of his.

The bronzed face looked very gaunt, I thought, and his eyes were bright with that febrile glitter which once I had disliked, but which I had learned from experience were due to tremendous nervous excite-

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ment. At such times he could act with icy coolness and his mental faculties seemed temporarily to acquire an abnormal keenness. He made no direct reply; but —

"Have you any milk?" he jerked abruptly.

So wholly unexpected was the question, that for a moment I failed to grasp it. Then —

"Milk!" I began.

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

I turned to descend to the kitchen, when —

"The remains of the turbot from dinner, Petrie, would also be welcome, and I think I should like a trowel."

I stopped at the stairhead and faced him.

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

He laughed dryly.

"Forgive me, old man," he replied. "I was so preoccupied with my own train of thought that it never occurred to me how absurd my request must have sounded. I will explain my singular tastes later; at the moment, hustle is the watchword."

Evidently he was in earnest, and I ran downstairs accordingly, returning with a garden trowel, a plate of cold fish and a glass of milk.

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

I was past wondering, so I simply went and fetched a jug, into which he poured the milk. Then, with

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the trowel in his pocket, the plate of cold turbot in one hand and the milk jug in the other, he made for the door. He had it open when another idea evidently occurred to him.

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

I handed him the pistol without a word.

"Don't assume that I want to mystify you," he added, "but the presence of any one else might jeopardize my plan. I don't expect to be long."

The cold light of dawn flooded the hallway momentarily; then the door closed again and I went upstairs to my study, watching Nayland Smith as he strode across the common in the early morning mist. He was making for the Nine Elms, but I lost sight of him before he reached them.

I sat there for some time, watching for the first glow of sunrise. A policeman tramped past the house, and, a while later, a belated reveler in evening clothes. That sense of unreality assailed me again. Out there in the gray mists a man who was vested with powers which rendered him a law unto himself, who had the British Government behind him in all that he might choose to do, who had been summoned from Rangoon to London on singular and dangerous business, was employing himself with a plate of cold turbot, a jug of milk, and a trowel!

Away to the right, and just barely visible, a tramcar stopped by the common; then proceeded on its way, coming in a westerly direction. Its lights twinkled yellowly through the grayness, but I was

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less concerned with the approaching car than with the solitary traveler who had descended from it.

As the car went rocking by below me, I strained my eyes in an endeavor more clearly to discern the figure, which, leaving the highroad, had struck out across the common. It was that of a woman, who seemingly carried a bulky bag or parcel.

One must be a gross materialist to doubt that there are latent powers in man which man, in modern times, neglects, or knows not how to develop. I became suddenly conscious of a burning curiosity respecting this lonely traveler who traveled at an hour so strange. With no definite plan in mind, I went downstairs, took a cap from the rack, and walked briskly out of the house and across the common in a direction which I thought would enable me to head off the woman.

I had slightly miscalculated the distance, as Fate would have it, and with a patch of gorse effectually screening my approach, I came upon her, kneeling on the damp grass and unfastening the bundle which had attracted my attention. I stopped and watched her.

She was dressed in bedraggled fashion in rusty black, wore a common black straw hat and a thick veil; but it seemed to me that the dexterous hands at work untying the bundle were slim and white; and I perceived a pair of hideous cotton gloves lying on the turf beside her. As she threw open the wrappings and lifted out something that looked like a

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small shrimping net, I stepped around the bush, crossed silently the intervening patch of grass, and stood beside her.

A faint breath of perfume reached me — of a perfume which, like the secret incense of Ancient Egypt, seemed to assail my soul. The glamour of the Orient was in that subtle essence; and I only knew one woman who used it. I bent over the kneeling figure.

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

She came to her feet like a startled deer, and flung away from me with the lithe movement of some Eastern dancing girl.

Now came the sun, and its heralding rays struck sparks from the jewels upon the white fingers of this woman who wore the garments of a mendicant. My heart gave a great leap. It was with difficulty that I controlled my voice.

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

She stood watching me; even through the coarse veil I could see how her eyes glittered. I stooped and picked up the net.

"Oh!" The whispered word was scarcely audible, but it was enough; I doubted no longer.

"This is a net for bird snaring," I said. "What strange bird are you seeking — *Kâramanèh?*"

With a passionate gesture Kâramanèh snatched off the veil, and with it the ugly black hat. The cloud of wonderful, intractable hair came rumpling about her face, and her glorious eyes blazed out upon me.

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How beautiful they were, with the dark beauty of an Egyptian night; how often had they looked into mine in dreams!

To labor against a ceaseless yearning for a woman whom one knows, upon evidence that none but a fool might reject, to be worthless — evil; is there any torture to which the soul of man is subject, more pitiless? Yet this was my lot, for what past sins assigned to me I was unable to conjecture; and this was the woman, this lovely slave of a monster, this creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

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

Her lips trembled, but she made no reply.

"It is very convenient to forget, sometimes," I ran on bitterly, then checked myself; for I knew that my words were prompted by a feckless desire to hear her defense, by a fool's hope that it might be an acceptable one.

I looked again at the net contrivance in my hand; it had a strong spring fitted to it and a line attached. Quite obviously it was intended for snaring.

"What were you about to do?" I demanded sharply — but in my heart, poor fool that I was, I found admiration for the exquisite arch of Kârahanèh's lips, and reproach because they were so tremulous.

She spoke then.

"Dr. Petrie —"

"Well?"

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"You seem to be — angry with me, not so much because of what I do, as because I do not remember you. Yet —"

"Kindly do not revert to the matter," I interrupted. "You have chosen, very conveniently, to forget that once we were friends. Please yourself. But answer my question."

She clasped her hands with a sort of wild abandon.

"Why do you treat me so!" she cried; she had the most fascinating accent imaginable. "Throw me into prison, kill me if you like, for what I have done!" She stamped her foot. "For what I have done! But do not torture me, try to drive me mad with your reproaches — that I forget you! I tell you — again I tell you — that until you came one night, last week, to rescue some one from —" There was the old trick of hesitating before the name of Fu-Manchu —"from *him*, I had never, never seen you!"

The dark eyes looked into mine, afire with a positive hunger for belief — or so I was sorely tempted to suppose. But the facts were against her.

"Such a declaration is worthless," I said, as coldly as I could. "You are a traitress; you betray those who are mad enough to trust you —"

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

"This is mere nonsense. You think that it will pay you better to serve Fu-Manchu than to remain true to your friends. Your 'slavery' — for I take

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it you are posing as a slave again — is evidently not very harsh. You serve Fu-Manchu, lure men to their destruction, and in return he loads you with jewels, lavishes gifts —"

"Ah! so!"

She sprang forward, raising flaming eyes to mine; her lips were slightly parted. With that wild abandon which betrayed the desert blood in her veins, she wrenched open the neck of her bodice and slipped a soft shoulder free of the garment. She twisted around, so that the white skin was but inches removed from me.

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

I clenched my teeth. Insane thoughts flooded my mind. For that creamy skin was red with the marks of the lash!

She turned, quickly rearranging her dress, and watching me the while. I could not trust myself to speak for a moment, then:

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

"I have known you long enough to trust you!" she said simply, and turned her head aside.

"Then why do you serve this inhuman monster?"

She snapped her fingers oddly, and looked up at me from under her lashes. "Why do you question me if you think that everything I say is a lie?"

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

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"Tell me what you came here to do," I demanded.

She pointed to the net in my hands.

"To catch birds; you have said so yourself."

"What bird?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

And now a memory was born within my brain; it was that of the cry of the nighthawk which had harbingered the death of Forsyth! The net was a large and strong one; could it be that some horrible fowl of the air — some creature unknown to Western naturalists — had been released upon the common last night? I thought of the marks upon Forsyth's face and throat; I thought of the profound knowledge of obscure and dreadful things possessed by the Chinaman.

The wrapping, in which the net had been, lay at my feet. I stooped and took out from it a wicker basket. Kâramanèh stood watching me and biting her lip, but she made no move to check me. I opened the basket. It contained a large phial, the contents of which possessed a pungent and peculiar smell.

I was utterly mystified.

"You will have to accompany me to my house," I said sternly.

Kâramanèh upturned her great eyes to mine. They were wide with fear. She was on the point of speaking when I extended my hand to grasp her. At that, the look of fear was gone and one of rebellion held its place. Ere I had time to realize her

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purpose, she flung back from me with that wild grace which I had met with in no other woman, turned — and ran!

Fatuously, net and basket in hand, I stood looking after her. The idea of pursuit came to me certainly; but I doubted if I could have outrun her. For Kâramanèh ran, not like a girl used to town or even country life, but with the lightness and swiftness of a gazelle; ran like the daughter of the desert that she was.

Some two hundred yards she went, stopped, and looked back. It would seem that the sheer joy of physical effort had aroused the devil in her, the devil that must lie latent in every woman with eyes like the eyes of Kâramanèh.

In the ever brightening sunlight I could see the lithe figure swaying; no rags imaginable could mask its beauty. I could see the red lips and gleaming teeth. Then — and it was music good to hear, despite its taunt — she laughed defiantly, turned, and ran again!

I resigned myself to defeat; I blush to add, gladly! Some evidences of a world awakening were perceptible about me now. Feathered choirs hailed the new day joyously. Carrying the mysterious contrivance which I had captured from the enemy, I set out in the direction of my house, my mind very busy with conjectures respecting the link between this bird snare and the cry like that of a nighthawk which we had heard at the moment of Forsyth's death.

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The path that I had chosen led me around the border of the Mound Pond — a small pool having an islet in the center. Lying at the margin of the pond I was amazed to see the plate and jug which Nayland Smith had borrowed recently!

Dropping my burden, I walked down to the edge of the water. I was filled with a sudden apprehension. Then, as I bent to pick up the now empty jug, came a hail:

"All right, Petrie! Shall join you in a moment!"

I started up, looked to right and left; but, although the voice had been that of Nayland Smith, no sign could I discern of his presence!

"Smith!" I cried — "Smith!"

"Coming!"

Seriously doubting my senses, I looked in the direction from which the voice had seemed to proceed — and there was Nayland Smith.

He stood on the islet in the center of the pond, and, as I perceived him, he walked down into the shallow water and waded across to me!

"Good heavens!" I began —

One of his rare laughs interrupted me.

"You must think me mad this morning, Petrie!" he said. "But I have made several discoveries. Do you know what that islet in the pond really is?"

"Merely an islet, I suppose —"

"Nothing of the kind; it is a burial mound,

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Petrie! It marks the site of one of the Plague Pits where victims were buried during the Great Plague of London. You will observe that, although you have seen it every morning for some years, it remains for a British Commissioner resident in Burma to acquaint you with its history! Hullo!"— the laughter was gone from his eyes, and they were steely hard again —" what the blazes have we here!"

He picked up the net. "What! a bird trap!"

"Exactly!" I said.

Smith turned his searching gaze upon me. "Where did you find it, Petrie?"

"I did not exactly find it," I replied; and I related to him the circumstances of my meeting with Kâramanèh.

He directed that cold stare upon me throughout the narrative, and when, with some embarrassment, I had told him of the girl's escape —

"Petrie," he said succinctly, "you are an imbecile!"

I flushed with anger, for not even from Nayland Smith, whom I esteemed above all other men, could I accept such words uttered as he had uttered them. We glared at one another.

"Kâramanèh," he continued coldly, "is a beautiful toy, I grant you; but so is a cobra. Neither is suitable for playful purposes."

"Smith!" I cried hotly —" drop that! Adopt another tone or I cannot listen to you!"

"You *must* listen," he said, squaring his lean jaw

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truculently. "You are playing, not only with a pretty girl who is the favorite of a Chinese Nero, but with *my life!* And I object, Petrie, on purely personal grounds!"

I felt my anger oozing from me; for this was strictly just. I had nothing to say, and Smith continued:

"You *know* that she is utterly false, yet a glance or two from those dark eyes of hers can make a fool of you! A woman made a fool of me, once; but I learned my lesson; you have failed to learn yours. If you are determined to go to pieces on the rock that broke up Adam, do so! But don't involve me in the wreck, Petrie — for that might mean a yellow emperor of the world, and you know it!"

"Your words are unnecessarily brutal, Smith," I said, feeling very crestfallen, "but there — perhaps I fully deserve them all."

"You *do!*" he assured me, but he relaxed immediately. "A murderous attempt is made upon my life, resulting in the death of a perfectly innocent man in no way concerned. Along you come and let an accomplice, perhaps a participant, escape, merely because she has a red mouth, or black lashes, or whatever it is that fascinates you so hopelessly!"

He opened the wicker basket, sniffing at the contents.

"Ah!" he snapped, "do you recognize this odor?"

"Certainly."

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"Then you have some idea respecting Kâra-manèh's quarry?"

"Nothing of the kind!"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along, Petrie," he said, linking his arm in mine.

We proceeded. Many questions there were that I wanted to put to him, but one above all.

"Smith," I said, "what, in Heaven's name, were you doing on the mound? Digging something up?"

"No," he replied, smiling dryly; "burying something!"

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CHAPTER VI

Under the Elms

DUSK found Nayland Smith and me at the top bedroom window. We knew, now that poor Forsyth's body had been properly examined, that he had died from poisoning. Smith, declaring that I did not deserve his confidence, had refused to confide in me his theory of the origin of the peculiar marks upon the body.

"On the soft ground under the trees," he said, "I found his tracks right up to the point where — something happened. There were no other fresh tracks for several yards around. He was attacked as he stood close to the trunk of one of the elms. Six or seven feet away I found some other tracks, very much like this."

He marked a series of dots upon the blotting pad at his elbow.

"Claws!" I cried. "That eerie call! like the call of a nighthawk — is it some unknown species of — flying thing?"

"We shall see, shortly; possibly to-night," was his reply. "Since, probably owing to the absence of any moon, a mistake was made," his jaw hardened at the thoughts of poor Forsyth —"another attempt

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along the same lines will almost certainly follow — you know Fu-Manchu's system?"

So in the darkness, expectant, we sat watching the group of nine elms. To-night the moon was come, raising her Aladdin's lamp up to the star world and summoning magic shadows into being. By midnight the highroad showed deserted, the common was a place of mystery; and save for the periodical passage of an electric car, in blazing modernity, this was a fit enough stage for an eerie drama.

No notice of the tragedy had appeared in print; Nayland Smith was vested with powers to silence the press. No detectives, no special constables, were posted. My friend was of opinion that the publicity which had been given to the deeds of Dr. Fu-Manchu in the past, together with the sometimes clumsy co-operation of the police, had contributed not a little to the Chinaman's success.

"There is only one thing to fear," he jerked suddenly; "he may not be ready for another attempt to-night."

"Why?"

"Since he has only been in England for a short time, his menagerie of venomous things may be a limited one at present."

Earlier in the evening there had been a brief but violent thunderstorm, with a tropical downpour of rain, and now clouds were scudding across the blue of the sky. Through a temporary rift in the veiling the crescent of the moon looked down upon us. It

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had a greenish tint, and it set me thinking of the filmed, green eyes of Fu-Manchu.

The cloud passed and a lake of silver spread out to the edge of the coppice, where it terminated at a shadow bank.

"There it is, Petrie!" hissed Nayland Smith.

A lambent light was born in the darkness; it rose slowly, unsteadily, to a great height, and died.

"It's under the trees, Smith!"

But he was already making for the door. Over his shoulder:

"Bring the pistol, Petrie!" he cried; "I have another. Give me at least twenty yards' start or no attempt may be made. But the instant I'm under the trees, join me."

Out of the house we ran, and over onto the common, which latterly had been a pageant ground for phantom warring. The light did not appear again; and as Smith plunged off toward the trees, I wondered if he knew what uncanny thing was hidden there. I more than suspected that he had solved the mystery.

His instructions to keep well in the rear I understood. Fu-Manchu, or the creature of Fu-Manchu, would attempt nothing in the presence of a witness. But we knew full well that the instrument of death which was hidden in the elm coppice could do its ghastly work and leave no clue, could slay and vanish. For had not Forsyth come to a dreadful end while Smith and I were within twenty yards of him?

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Not a breeze stirred, as Smith, ahead of me — for I had slowed my pace — came up level with the first tree. The moon sailed clear of the straggling cloud wisps which alone told of the recent storm; and I noted that an irregular patch of light lay silvern on the moist ground under the elms where otherwise lay shadow.

He passed on, slowly. I began to run again. Black against the silvern patch, I saw him emerge — and look up.

"Be careful, Smith!" I cried — and I was racing under the trees to join him.

Uttering a loud cry, he leaped — away from the pool of light.

"Stand back, Petrie!" he screamed — "Back! further!"

He charged into me, shoulder lowered, and sent me reeling!

Mixed up with his excited cry I had heard a loud splintering and sweeping of branches overhead; and now as we staggered into the shadows it seemed that one of the elms was reaching down to touch us! So, at least, the phenomenon presented itself to my mind in that fleeting moment while Smith, uttering his warning cry, was hurling me back.

Then the truth became apparent.

With an appalling crash, a huge bough fell from above. One piercing, awful shriek there was, a crackling of broken branches, and a choking groan . . .

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The crack of Smith's pistol close beside me completed my confusion of mind.

"Missed!" he yelled. "Shoot it, Petrie! On your left! For God's sake don't miss it!"

I turned. A lithe black shape was streaking past me. I fired — once — twice. Another frightful cry made yet more hideous the nocturne.

Nayland Smith was directing the ray of a pocket torch upon the fallen bough.

"Have you killed it, Petrie?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!"

I stood beside him, looking down. From the tangle of leaves and twigs an evil yellow face looked up at us. The features were contorted with agony, but the malignant eyes, wherein light was dying, regarded us with inflexible hatred. The man was pinned beneath the heavy bough; his back was broken; and as we watched, he expired, frothing slightly at the mouth, and quitted his tenement of clay, leaving those glassy eyes set hideously upon us.

"The pagan gods fight upon our side," said Smith strangely. "Elms have a dangerous habit of shedding boughs in still weather — particularly after a storm. Pan, god of the woods, with this one has performed Justice's work of retribution."

"I don't understand. Where was this man —"

"Up the tree, lying along the bough which fell, Petrie! That is why he left no footmarks. Last night no doubt he made his escape by swinging from bough to bough, ape fashion, and descending to the

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ground somewhere at the other side of the coppice."

He glanced at me.

"You are wondering, perhaps," he suggested, "what caused the mysterious light? I could have told you this morning, but I fear I was in a bad temper, Petrie. It's very simple: a length of tape soaked in spirit or something of the kind, and sheltered from the view of any one watching from your windows, behind the trunk of the tree; then, the end ignited, lowered, still behind the tree, to the ground. The operator swinging it around, the flame ascended, of course. I found the unburned fragment of the tape last night, a few yards from here."

I was peering down at Fu-Manchu's servant, the hideous yellow man who lay dead in a bower of elm leaves.

"He has some kind of leather bag beside him," I began —

"Exactly!" rapped Smith. "In that he carried his dangerous instrument of death; from that he released it!"

"Released what?"

"What your fascinating friend came to recapture this morning."

"Don't taunt me, Smith!" I said bitterly. "Is it some species of bird?"

"You saw the marks on Forsyth's body, and I told you of those which I had traced upon the ground here. They were caused by *claws*, Petrie!"

"Claws! I thought so! But *what* claws?"

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"The claws of a poisonous thing. I recaptured the one used last night, killed it — against my will — and buried it on the mound. I was afraid to throw it in the pond, lest some juvenile fisherman should pull it out and sustain a scratch. I don't know how long the claws would remain venomous."

"You are treating me like a child, Smith," I said slowly. "No doubt I am hopelessly obtuse, but perhaps you will tell me what this Chinaman carried in a leather bag and released upon Forsyth. It was something which you recaptured, apparently with the aid of a plate of cold turbot and a jug of milk! It was something, also, which Kâramanèh had been sent to recapture with the aid —"

I stopped.

"Go on," said Nayland Smith, turning the ray to the left, "what did she have in the basket?"

"Valerian," I replied mechanically.

The ray rested upon the lithe creature that I had shot down.

It was a black cat!

"A cat will go through fire and water for valerian," said Smith; "but I got first innings this morning with fish and milk! I had recognized the imprints under the trees for those of a cat, and I knew that if a cat had been released here it would still be hiding in the neighborhood, probably in the bushes. I finally located a cat, sure enough, and came for bait! I laid my trap, for the animal was too frightened to be approachable, and then shot it; I had to. That

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yellow fiend used the light as a decoy. The branch which killed him jutted out over the path at a spot where an opening in the foliage above allowed some moon rays to penetrate. Directly the victim stood beneath, the Chinaman uttered his bird cry; the one below looked up, and the cat, previously held silent and helpless in the leather sack, was dropped accurately upon his head!"

"But"— I was growing confused.

Smith stooped lower.

"The cat's claws are sheathed now," he said; "but if you could examine them you would find that they are coated with a shining black substance. Only Fu-Manchu knows what that substance is, Petrie; but you and I know what it can do!"

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CHAPTER VII

Enter Mr. Abel Slattin

"I DON'T blame you!" rapped Nayland Smith. "Suppose we say, then, a thousand pounds if you show us the present hiding-place of Fu-Manchu, the payment to be in no way subject to whether we profit by your information or not?"

Abel Slattin shrugged his shoulders, racially, and returned to the armchair which he had just quitted. He reseated himself, placing his hat and cane upon my writing-table.

"A little agreement in black and white?" he suggested smoothly.

Smith raised himself up out of the white cane chair, and, bending forward over a corner of the table, scribbled busily upon a sheet of notepaper with my fountain-pen.

The while he did so, I covertly studied our visitor. He lay back in the armchair, his heavy eyelids lowered deceptively. He was a thought overdressed — a big man, dark-haired and well groomed, who toyed with a monocle most unsuitable to his type. During the preceding conversation, I had been vaguely surprised to note Mr. Abel Slattin's marked American accent.

Sometimes, when Slattin moved, a big diamond

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which he wore upon the third finger of his right hand glittered magnificently. There was a sort of bluish tint underlying the dusky skin, noticeable even in his hands but proclaiming itself significantly in his puffy face and especially under the eyes. I diagnosed a laboring valve somewhere in the heart system.

Nayland Smith's pen scratched on. My glance strayed from our Semitic caller to his cane, lying upon the red leather before me. It was of most unusual workmanship, apparently Indian, being made of some kind of dark brown, mottled wood, bearing a marked resemblance to a snake's skin; and the top of the cane was carved in conformity, to represent the head of what I took to be a puff-adder, fragments of stone, or beads, being inserted to represent the eyes, and the whole thing being finished with an artistic realism almost startling.

When Smith had tossed the written page to Slattin, and he, having read it with an appearance of carelessness, had folded it neatly and placed it in his pocket, I said:

"You have a curio here?"

Our visitor, whose dark eyes revealed all the satisfaction which, by his manner, he sought to conceal, nodded and took up the cane in his hand.

"It comes from Australia, Doctor," he replied; "it's aboriginal work, and was given to me by a client. You thought it was Indian? Everybody does. It's my mascot."

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"Really?"

"It is indeed. Its former owner ascribed magical powers to it! In fact, I believe he thought that it was one of those staffs mentioned in biblical history —"

"Aaron's rod?" suggested Smith, glancing at the cane.

"Something of the sort," said Slattin, standing up and again preparing to depart.

"You will 'phone us, then?" asked my friend.

"You will hear from me to-morrow," was the reply.

Smith returned to the cane armchair, and Slattin, bowing to both of us, made his way to the door as I rang for the girl to show him out.

"Considering the importance of his proposal," I began, as the door closed, "you hardly received our visitor with cordiality."

"I hate to have any relations with him," answered my friend; "but we must not be squeamish respecting our instruments in dealing with Dr. Fu-Manchu. Slattin has a rotten reputation — even for a private inquiry agent. He is little better than a blackmailer —"

"How do you know?"

"Because I called on our friend Weymouth at the Yard yesterday and looked up the man's record."

"Whatever for?"

"I knew that he was concerning himself, for some reason, in the case. Beyond doubt he has established

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some sort of communication with the Chinese group; I am only wondering —"

"You don't mean —"

"Yes — I do, Petrie! I tell you he is unscrupulous enough to stoop even to that."

No doubt, Slattin knew that this gaunt, eager-eyed Burmese commissioner was vested with ultimate authority in his quest of the mighty Chinaman who represented things unutterable, whose potentialities for evil were boundless as his genius, who personified a secret danger, the extent and nature of which none of us truly understood. And, learning of these things, with unerring Semitic instinct he had sought an opening in this glittering Rialto. But there were *two* bidders!

"You think he may have sunk so low as to become a creature of Fu-Manchu?" I asked, aghast.

"Exactly! If it paid him well I do not doubt that he would serve that master as readily as any other. His record is about as black as it well could be. Slattin is of course an assumed name; he was known as Lieutenant Pepley when he belonged to the New York Police, and he was kicked out of the service for complicity in an unsavory Chinatown case."

"Chinatown!"

"Yes, Petrie, it made me wonder, too; and we must not forget that he is undeniably a clever scoundrel."

"Shall you keep any appointment which he may suggest?"

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"Undoubtedly. But I shall not wait until to-morrow."

"What!"

"I propose to pay a little informal visit to Mr. Abel Slattin, to-night."

"At his office?"

"No; at his private residence. If, as I more than suspect, his object is to draw us into some trap, he will probably report his favorable progress to his employer to-night!"

"Then we should have followed him!"

Nayland Smith stood up and divested himself of the old shooting-jacket.

"He *has* been followed, Petrie," he replied, with one of his rare smiles. "Two C. I. D. men have been watching the house all night!"

This was entirely characteristic of my friend's far-seeing methods.

"By the way," I said, "you saw Eltham this morning. He will soon be convalescent. Where, in heaven's name, can he —"

"Don't be alarmed on his behalf, Petrie," interrupted Smith. "His life is no longer in danger."

I stared, stupidly.

"No longer in danger!"

"He received, some time yesterday, a letter, written in Chinese, upon Chinese paper, and enclosed in an ordinary business envelope, having a typewritten address and bearing a London postmark."

"Well?"

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"As nearly as I can render the message in English, it reads: 'Although, because you are a brave man, you would not betray your correspondent in China, he has been discovered. He was a mandarin, and as I cannot write the name of a traitor, I may not name him. He was executed four days ago. I salute you and pray for your speedy recovery. Fu-Manchu.'"

"Fu-Manchu! But it is almost certainly a trap."

"On the contrary, Petrie — Fu-Manchu would not have written in Chinese unless he were sincere; and, to clear all doubt, I received a cable this morning reporting that the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat was assassinated in his own garden, in Nan-Yang, one day last week."

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CHAPTER VIII

Dr. Fu-Manchu Strikes

TOGETHER we marched down the slope of the quiet, suburban avenue; to take pause before a small, detached house displaying the hatchet boards of the Estate Agent. Here we found unkempt laurel bushes and acacias run riot, from which arboreal tangle protruded the notice —"To be Let or Sold."

Smith, with an alert glance to right and left, pushed open the wooden gate and drew me in upon the gravel path. Darkness mantled all; for the nearest street lamp was fully twenty yards beyond.

From the miniature jungle bordering the path, a soft whistle sounded.

"Is that Carter?" called Smith, sharply.

A shadowy figure uprose, and vaguely I made it out for that of a man in the unobtrusive blue serge which is the undress uniform of the Force.

"Well?" rapped my companion.

"Mr. Slattin returned ten minutes ago, sir," reported the constable. "He came in a cab which he dismissed —"

"He has not left again?"

"A few minutes after his return," the man continued, "another cab came up, and a lady alighted."

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"A lady!"

"The same, sir, that has called upon him before."

"Smith!" I whispered, plucking at his arm —"is it —"

He half turned, nodding his head; and my heart began to throb foolishly. For now the manner of Slattin's campaign suddenly was revealed to me. In our operations against the Chinese murder-group two years before, we had had an ally in the enemy's camp — Kâramanèh, the beautiful slave, whose presence in those happenings of the past had colored the sometimes sordid drama with the opulence of old Arabia; who had seemed a fitting figure for the romances of Bagdad during the Caliphate — Kâramanèh, whom I had thought sincere, whose inscrutable Eastern soul I had presumed, fatuously, to have laid bare and analyzed.

Now, once again she was plying her old trade of go-between; professing to reveal the secrets of Dr. Fu-Manchu, and all the time — I could not doubt it — inveigling men into the net of this awful fisher.

Yesterday, I had been her dupe; yesterday, I had rejoiced in my captivity. To-day, I was not the favored one; to-day I had not been selected recipient of her confidences — confidences sweet, seductive, deadly: but Abel Slattin, a plausible rogue, who, in justice, should be immured in Sing Sing, was chosen out, was enslaved by those lovely mysterious eyes, was taking to his soul the lies which fell from those perfect lips, triumphant in a conquest that must end

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in his undoing; deeming, poor fool, that for love of him this pearl of the Orient was about to betray her master, to resign herself a prize to the victor!

Companioned by these bitter reflections, I had lost the remainder of the conversation between Nayland Smith and the police officer; now, casting off the succubus memory which threatened to obsess me, I put forth a giant mental effort to purge my mind of this uncleanness, and became again an active participant in the campaign against the Master — the director of all things noxious.

Our plans being evidently complete, Smith seized my arm, and I found myself again out upon the avenue. He led me across the road and into the gate of a house almost opposite. From the fact that two upper windows were illuminated, I adduced that the servants were retiring; the other windows were in darkness, except for one on the ground floor to the extreme left of the building, through the lowered venetian blinds whereof streaks of light shone out.

"Slattin's study!" whispered Smith. "He does not anticipate surveillance, and you will note that the window is wide open!"

With that my friend crossed the strip of lawn, and careless of the fact that his silhouette must have been visible to any one passing the gate, climbed carefully up the artificial rockery intervening, and crouched upon the window-ledge peering into the room.

A moment I hesitated, fearful that if I followed,

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I should stumble or dislodge some of the larva blocks of which the rockery was composed.

Then I heard that which summoned me to the attempt, whatever the cost.

Through the open window came the sound of a musical voice — a voice possessing a haunting accent, possessing a quality which struck upon my heart and set it quivering as though it were a gong hung in my bosom.

Kâramanèh was speaking.

Upon hands and knees, heedless of damage to my garments, I crawled up beside Smith. One of the laths was slightly displaced and over this my friend was peering in. Crouching close beside him, I peered in also.

I saw the study of a business man, with its files, neatly arranged works of reference, roll-top desk, and Milner safe. Before the desk, in a revolving chair, sat Slattin. He sat half turned toward the window, leaning back and smiling; so that I could note the gold crown which preserved the lower left molar. In an armchair by the window, close, very close, and sitting with her back to me, was Kâramanèh!

She, who, in my dreams, I always saw, was ever seeing, in an Eastern dress, with gold bands about her white ankles, with jewel-laden fingers, with jewels in her hair, wore now a fashionable costume and a hat that could only have been produced in Paris. Kâramanèh was the one Oriental woman I had ever

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known who could wear European clothes; and as I watched that exquisite profile, I thought that Delilah must have been just such another as this, that, excepting the Empress Poppæa, history has record of no woman, who, looking so innocent, was yet so utterly vile.

"Yes, my dear," Slattin was saying, and through his monocle ogling his beautiful visitor, "I shall be ready for you to-morrow night."

I felt Smith start at the words.

"There will be a sufficient number of men?"

Kâramanèh put the question in a strangely listless way.

"My dear little girl," replied Slattin, rising and standing looking down at her, with his gold tooth twinkling in the lamplight, "there will be a whole division, if a whole division is necessary."

He sought to take her white gloved hand, which rested upon the chair arm; but she evaded the attempt with seeming artlessness, and stood up. Slattin fixed his bold gaze upon her.

"So now, give me my orders," he said.

"I am not prepared to do so, yet," replied the girl, composedly; "but now that I know you are ready, I can make my plans."

She glided past him to the door, avoiding his outstretched arm with an artless art which made me writhe; for once I had been the willing victim of all these wiles.

"But —" began Slattin.

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"I will ring you up in less than half an hour," said Kâramanèh; and without further ceremony, she opened the door.

I still had my eyes glued to the aperture in the blind, when Smith began tugging at my arm.

"Down! you fool!" he hissed harshly—"if she sees us, all is lost!"

Realizing this, and none too soon, I turned, and rather clumsily followed my friend. I dislodged a piece of granite in my descent; but, fortunately, Slattin had gone out into the hall and could not well have heard it.

We were crouching around an angle of the house, when a flood of light poured down the steps, and Kâramanèh rapidly descended. I had a glimpse of a dark-faced man who evidently had opened the door for her, then all my thoughts were centered upon that graceful figure receding from me in the direction of the avenue. She wore a loose cloak, and I saw this fluttering for a moment against the white gate posts; then she was gone.

Yet Smith did not move. Detaining me with his hand he crouched there against a quick-set hedge; until, from a spot lower down the hill, we heard the start of the cab which had been waiting. Twenty seconds elapsed, and from some other distant spot a second cab started.

"That's Weymouth!" snapped Smith. "With decent luck, we should know Fu-Manchu's hiding-place before Slattin tells us!"

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"But—"

"Oh! as it happens, he's apparently playing the game."— In the half-light, Smith stared at me significantly —"Which makes it all the more important," he concluded, "that we should not rely upon his aid!"

Those grim words were prophetic.

My companion made no attempt to communicate with the detective (or detectives) who shared our vigil; we took up a position close under the lighted study window and waited — waited.

Once, a taxi-cab labored hideously up the steep gradient of the avenue . . . It was gone. The lights at the upper windows above us became extinguished. A policeman tramped past the gateway, casually flashing his lamp in at the opening. One by one the illuminated windows in other houses visible to us became dull; then lived again as mirrors for the pallid moon. In the silence, words spoken within the study were clearly audible; and we heard some one — presumably the man who had opened the door — inquire if his services would be wanted again that night.

Smith inclined his head and hung over me in a tense attitude, in order to catch Slattin's reply.

"Yes, Burke," it came —"I want you to sit up until I return; I shall be going out shortly."

Evidently the man withdrew at that; for a complete silence followed which prevailed for fully half an hour. I sought cautiously to move my cramped

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limbs, unlike Smith, who seeming to have sinews of piano-wire, crouched beside me immovable, untiringly. Then loud upon the stillness, broke the strident note of the telephone bell.

I started, nervously, clutching at Smith's arm. It felt hard as iron to my grip.

"Hullo!" I heard Slattin call—"who is speaking? . . . Yes, yes! This is Mr. A. S. . . . I am to come at once? . . . I know where—yes! . . . you will meet me there? . . . Good!—I shall be with you in half an hour. . . . Good-by!"

Distinctly I heard the creak of the revolving office-chair as Slattin rose; then Smith had me by the arm, and we were flying swiftly away from the door to take up our former post around the angle of the building. This gained:

"He's going to his death!" rapped Smith beside me; "but Carter has a cab from the Yard waiting in the nearest rank. We shall follow to see where he goes—for it is possible that Weymouth may have been thrown off the scent; then, when we are sure of his destination, we can take a hand in the game! We . . ."

The end of the sentence was lost to me—drowned in such a frightful wave of sound as I despair to describe. It began with a high, thin scream, which was choked off staccato fashion; upon it followed a loud and dreadful cry uttered with all the strength of Slattin's lungs—

"Oh, God!" he cried, and again—"Oh, God!"

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This in turn merged into a sort of hysterical sobbing.

I was on my feet now, and automatically making for the door. I had a vague impression of Nayland Smith's face beside me, the eyes glassy with a fearful apprehension. Then the door was flung open, and, in the bright light of the hall-way, I saw Slattin standing — swaying and seemingly fighting with the empty air.

"What is it? For God's sake, what has happened!" reached my ears dimly — and the man Burke showed behind his master. White-faced I saw him to be; for now Smith and I were racing up the steps.

Ere we could reach him, Slattin, uttering another choking cry, pitched forward and lay half across the threshold.

We burst into the hall, where Burke stood with both his hands raised dazedly to his head. I could hear the sound of running feet upon the gravel, and knew that Carter was coming to join us.

Burke, a heavy man with a lowering, bull-dog type of face, collapsed onto his knees beside Slattin, and began softly to laugh in little rising peals.

"Drop that!" snapped Smith, and grasping him by the shoulders, he sent him spinning along the hall-way, where he sank upon the bottom step of the stairs, to sit with his outstretched fingers extended before his face, and peering at us grotesquely through the crevices.

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There were rustlings and subdued cries from the upper part of the house. Carter came in out of the darkness, carefully stepping over the recumbent figure; and the three of us stood there in the lighted hall looking down at Slattin.

"Help us to move him back," directed Smith, tensely; "far enough to close the door."

Between us we accomplished this, and Carter fastened the door. We were alone with the shadow of Fu-Manchu's vengeance; for as I knelt beside the body on the floor, a look and a touch sufficed to tell me that this was but clay from which the spirit had fled!

Smith met my glance as I raised my head, and his teeth came together with a loud snap; the jaw muscles stood out prominently beneath the dark skin; and his face was grimly set in that odd, half-despairful expression which I knew so well but which boded so ill for whomsoever occasioned it.

"Dead, Petrie! — already?"

"Lightning could have done the work no better. Can I turn him over?"

Smith nodded.

Together we stooped and rolled the heavy body on its back. A flood of whispers came sibilantly from the stairway. Smith spun around rapidly, and glared upon the group of half-dressed servants.

"Return to your rooms!" he rapped, imperiously; "let no one come into the hall without my orders."

The masterful voice had its usual result: there was

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a hurried retreat to the upper landing. Burke, shaking like a man with an ague, sat on the lower step, pathetically drumming his palms upon his uplifted knees.

"I warned him, I warned him!" he mumbled monotonously, "I warned him, oh, I warned him!"

"Stand up!" shouted Smith—"stand up and come here!"

The man, with his frightened eyes turning to right and left, and seeming to search for something in the shadows about him, advanced obediently.

"Have you a flask?" demanded Smith of Carter.

The detective silently administered to Burke a stiff restorative.

"Now," continued Smith, "you, Petrie, will want to examine him, I suppose?" He pointed to the body. "And in the meantime I have some questions to put to you, my man."

He clapped his hand upon Burke's shoulder.

"My God!" Burke broke out, "I was ten yards from him when it happened!"

"No one is accusing you," said Smith, less harshly; "but since you were the only witness, it is by your aid that we hope to clear the matter up."

Exerting a gigantic effort to regain control of himself, Burke nodded, watching my friend with a child-like eagerness. During the ensuing conversation, I examined Slattin for marks of violence; and of what I found, more anon.

"In the first place," said Smith, "you say that you

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warned him. When did you warn him, and of what?"

"I warned him, sir, that it would come to this —"

"That *what* would come to this?"

"His dealings with the Chinaman!"

"He had dealings with Chinamen?"

"He accidentally met a Chinaman at an East End gaming-house, a man he had known in Frisco — a man called Singapore Charlie —"

"What! Singapore Charlie!"

"Yes, sir, the same man that had a dope-shop, two years ago, down Ratcliffe way —"

"There was a fire —"

"But Singapore Charlie escaped, sir."

"And he is one of the gang?"

"He is one of what we used to call in New York, the Seven Group."

Smith began to tug at the lobe of his left ear, reflectively, as I saw out of the corner of my eye.

"The Seven Group!" he mused. "That is significant. I always suspected that Dr. Fu-Manchu and the notorious Seven Group were one and the same. Go on, Burke."

"Well, sir," the man continued, more calmly, "the lieutenant —"

"The lieutenant!" began Smith; then: "Oh! of course; Slattin used to be a police lieutenant!"

"Well, sir, he — Mr. Slattin — had a sort of hold on this Singapore Charlie, and two years ago, when he first met him, he thought that with his aid

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he was going to pull off the biggest thing of his life —"

"Forestall *me*, in fact?"

"Yes, sir; but you got in first with the big raid — and spoiled it."

Smith nodded grimly, glancing at the Scotland Yard man, who returned his nod with equal grimness.

"A couple of months ago," resumed Burke, "he met Charlie again down East, and the Chinaman introduced him to a girl — some sort of an Egyptian girl."

"Go on!" snapped Smith —"I know her."

"He saw her a good many times — and she came here once or twice. She made out that she and Singapore Charlie were prepared to give away the boss of the Yellow gang —"

"For a price, of course?"

"I suppose so," said Burke; "but I don't know. I only know that I warned him."

"H'm!" muttered Smith. "And now, what took place to-night?"

"He had an appointment here with the girl," began Burke —

"I know all that," interrupted Smith. "I merely want to know, what took place after the telephone call?"

"Well, he told me to wait up, and I was dozing in the next room to the study — the dining-room — when the 'phone bell aroused me. I heard the lieu-

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tenant — Mr. Slattin, coming out, and I ran out too, but only in time to see him taking his hat from the rack —"

"But he wears no hat!"

"He never got it off the peg! Just as he reached up to take it, he gave a most frightful scream, and turned around like lightning as though some one had attacked him from behind!"

"There was no one else in the hall?"

"No one at all. I was standing down there outside the dining-room just by the stairs, but he didn't turn in my direction, he turned and looked right behind him — where there was no one — nothing. His cries were frightful." Burke's voice broke, and he shuddered feverishly. "Then he made a rush for the front door. It seemed as though he had not seen me. He stood there screaming; but, before I could reach him, he fell. . . ."

Nayland Smith fixed a piercing gaze upon Burke.

"Is that all you know?" he demanded slowly.

"As God is my judge, sir, that's all I know, and all I saw. There was no living thing near him when he met his death."

"We shall see," muttered Smith. He turned to me —"What killed him?" he asked, shortly.

"Apparently, a minute wound on the left wrist," I replied, and, stooping, I raised the already cold hand in mine.

A tiny, inflamed wound showed on the wrist; and a certain puffiness was becoming observable in the

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injured hand and arm. Smith bent down and drew a quick, sibilant breath.

"You know what this is, Petrie?" he cried.

"Certainly. It was too late to employ a ligature and useless to inject ammonia. Death was practically instantaneous. His heart . . ."

There came a loud knocking and ringing.

"Carter!" cried Smith, turning to the detective, "open that door to no one — no one. Explain who I am —"

"But if it is the inspector? —"

"I said, open the door to *no one!*" snapped Smith. "Burke, stand exactly where you are! Carter, you can speak to whoever knocks, through the letter-box. Petrie, don't move for your life! It may be here, in the hallway! —"

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CHAPTER IX

OUR search of the house of Abel Slattin ceased only with the coming of the dawn, and yielded nothing but disappointment. Failure followed upon failure; for, in the gray light of the morning, our own quest concluded, Inspector Weymouth returned to report that the girl, Kâramanèh, had thrown him off the scent.

Again he stood before me, the big, burly friend of old and dreadful days, a little grayer above the temples, which I set down for a record of former horrors, but deliberate, stoical, thorough, as ever. His blue eyes melted in the old generous way as he saw me, and he gripped my hand in greeting.

"Once again," he said, "your dark-eyed friend has been too clever for me, Doctor. But the track as far as I could follow, leads to the old spot. In fact,"—he turned to Smith, who, grim-faced and haggard, looked thoroughly ill in that gray light—"I believe Fu-Manchu's lair is somewhere near the former opium-den of Shen-Yan—'Singapore Charlie.'"

Smith nodded.

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"We will turn our attention in that direction," he replied, "at a very early date."

Inspector Weymouth looked down at the body of Abel Slattin.

"How was it done?" he asked softly.

"Clumsily for Fu-Manchu," I replied. "A snake was introduced into the house by some means —"

"By Kâramanèh!" rapped Smith.

"Very possibly by Kâramanèh," I continued firmly. "The thing has escaped us."

"My own idea," said Smith, "is that it was concealed about his clothing. When he fell by the open door it glided out of the house. We must have the garden searched thoroughly by daylight."

"*He*"— Weymouth glanced at that which lay upon the floor —"must be moved; but otherwise we can leave the place untouched, clear out the servants, and lock the house up."

"I have already given orders to that effect," answered Smith. He spoke wearily and with a note of conscious defeat in his voice. "Nothing has been disturbed;"— he swept his arm around comprehensively —"papers and so forth you can examine at leisure."

Presently we quitted that house upon which the fateful Chinaman had set his seal, as the suburb was awakening to a new day. The clank of milk-cans was my final impression of the avenue to which a dreadful minister of death had come at the bidding of the death lord. We left Inspector Weymouth in

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charge and returned to my rooms, scarcely exchanging a word upon the way.

Nayland Smith, ignoring my entreaties, composed himself for slumber in the white cane chair in my study. About noon he retired to the bathroom, and returning, made a pretense of breakfast; then resumed his seat in the cane armchair. Carter reported in the afternoon, but his report was merely formal. Returning from my round of professional visits at half past five, I found Nayland Smith in the same position; and so the day waned into evening, and dusk fell uneventfully.

In the corner of the big room by the empty fireplace, Nayland Smith lay, with his long, lean frame extended in the white cane chair. A tumbler, from which two straws protruded, stood by his right elbow, and a perfect continent of tobacco smoke lay between us, wafted toward the door by the draught from an open window. He had littered the hearth with matches and tobacco ash, being the most untidy smoker I have ever met; and save for his frequent rapping-out of his pipe bowl and perpetual striking of matches, he had shown no sign of activity for the past hour. Collarless and wearing an old tweed jacket, he had spent the evening, as he had spent the day, in the cane chair, only quitting it for some ten minutes, or less, to toy with dinner.

My several attempts at conversation had elicited nothing but growls; therefore, as dusk descended, having dismissed my few patients, I busied myself

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collating my notes upon the renewed activity of the Yellow Doctor, and was thus engaged when the 'phone bell disturbed me. It was Smith who was wanted, however; and he went out eagerly, leaving me to my task.

At the end of a lengthy conversation, he returned from the 'phone and began, restlessly, to pace the room. I made a pretense of continuing my labors, but covertly I was watching him. He was twitching at the lobe of his left ear, and his face was a study in perplexity. Abruptly he burst out:

"I shall throw the thing up, Petrie! Either I am growing too old to cope with such an adversary as Fu-Manchu, or else my intellect has become dull. I cannot seem to think clearly or consistently. For the Doctor, this crime, this removal of Slattin, is clumsy — unfinished. There are two explanations. Either he, too, is losing his old cunning or he has been interrupted!"

"Interrupted!"

"Take the facts, Petrie,"— Smith clapped his hands upon my table and bent down, peering into my eyes —"is it characteristic of Fu-Manchu to kill a man by the direct agency of a snake and to implicate one of his own damnable servants in this way?"

"But we have found no snake!"

"Kâramanèh introduced one in some way. Do you doubt it?"

"Certainly Kâramanèh visited him on the evening of his death, but you must be perfectly well aware

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that even if she had been arrested, no jury could convict her."

Smith resumed his restless pacings up and down.

"You are very useful to me, Petrie," he replied; "as a counsel for the defense you constantly rectify my errors of prejudice. Yet I am convinced that our presence at Slattin's house last night prevented Fu-Manchu from finishing off this little matter as he had designed to do."

"What has given you this idea?"

"Weymouth is responsible. He has rung me up from the Yard. The constable on duty at the house where the murder was committed, reports that some one, less than an hour ago, attempted to break in."

"Break in!"

"Ah! you are interested? *I* thought the circumstance illuminating, also!"

"Did the officer see this person?"

"No; he only heard him. It was some one who endeavored to enter by the bathroom window, which, I am told, may be reached fairly easily by an agile climber."

"The attempt did not succeed?"

"No; the constable interrupted, but failed to make a capture or even to secure a glimpse of the man."

We were both silent for some moments; then:

"What do you propose to do?" I asked.

"We must not let Fu-Manchu's servants know," replied Smith, "but to-night I shall conceal myself in Slattin's house and remain there for a week or a day

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— it matters not how long — until that attempt is repeated. Quite obviously, Petrie, we have overlooked something which implicates the murderer with the murder! In short, either by accident, by reason of our superior vigilance, or by the clumsiness of his plans, Fu-Manchu for once in an otherwise blameless career, has left a *clue!*"

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CHAPTER X

The Climber Returns

IN utter darkness we groped our way through into the hallway of Slattin's house, having entered, stealthily, from the rear; for Smith had selected the study as a suitable base of operations. We reached it without mishap, and presently I found myself seated in the very chair which Kâramanèh had occupied; my companion took up a post just within the widely opened door.

So we commenced our ghostly business in the house of the murdered man — a house from which, but a few hours since, his body had been removed. This was such a vigil as I had endured once before, when, with Nayland Smith and another, I had waited for the coming of one of Fu-Manchu's death agents.

Of all the sounds which, one by one, now began to detach themselves from the silence, there was a particular sound, homely enough at another time, which spoke to me more dreadfully than the rest. It was the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece; and I thought how this sound must have been familiar to Abel Slattin, how it must have formed part and parcel of his life, as it were, and how it went on now — *tick-tick-tick-tick* — whilst he, for whom it had ticked, lay unheeding — would never heed it more.

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