

CHAPTER 15

THE train was late, and as our cab turned out of Waterloo Station and began to ascend to the bridge, from a hundred steeples rang out the gongs of midnight, the bell of St. Paul's raised above them all to vie with the deep voice of Big Ben.

I looked out from the cab window across the river to where, towering above the Embankment, that place of a thousand tragedies, the light of some of London's greatest caravanserais formed a sort of minor constellation. From the subdued blaze that showed the public supper-rooms I looked up to the hundreds of starry points marking the private apartments of those giant inns.

I thought how each twinkling window denoted the presence of some bird of passage, some wanderer temporarily abiding in our midst. There, floor piled upon floor above the chattering throngs, were these less gregarious units, each something of a mystery to his fellow-guests, each in his separate cell; and each as remote from real human companionship as if that cell were fashioned, not in the bricks of London, but in the rocks of Hindustan!

In one of those rooms Graham Guthrie might at that moment be sleeping, all unaware that he would awake to the Call of Siva, to the summons of death. As we neared the Strand, Smith stopped the cab, discharging the man outside Sotheby's auction-rooms.

"One of the doctor's watch-dogs may be in the foyer," he said thoughtfully, "and it might spoil everything if we were seen to go to Guthrie's rooms. There must be a back entrance to the kitchens, and so on?"

"There is," I replied quickly. "I have seen the vans delivering there. But have we time?"

"Yes. Lead on."

We walked up the Strand and hurried westward. Into that narrow court, with its iron posts and descending steps, upon which opens a well-known wine-cellar, we turned. Then, going parallel with the Strand, but on the Embankment level, we ran round the back of the great hotel, and came to double doors which were open. An arc lamp illuminated the interior and a number of men were at work among the casks, crates and packages stacked about the place. We entered.

"Hallo!" cried a man in a white overall, "where d'you think you're going?"

Smith grasped him by the arm.

"I want to get to the public part of the hotel without being seen from the entrance hall," he said. "Will you please lead the way?"

"Here--" began the other, staring.

"Don't waste time!" snapped my friend, in that tone of authority which he knew so well how to assume. "It's a matter of life and death. Lead the way, I say!"

"Police, sir?" asked the man civilly.

"Yes," said Smith; "hurry!"

Off went our guide without further demur. Skirting sculleries, kitchens, laundries and engine-rooms, he led us through those mysterious labyrinths which have no existence for the guest above, but which contain the machinery that renders these modern khans the Aladdin's palaces they are. On a second-floor landing we met a man in a tweed suit, to whom our cicerone presented us.

"Glad I met you, sir. Two gentlemen from the police."

The man regarded us haughtily with a suspicious smile.

"Who are you?" he asked. "You're not from Scotland Yard, at any rate!"

Smith pulled out a card and thrust it into the speaker's hand.

"If you are the hotel detective," he said, "take us without delay to Mr. Graham Guthrie."

A marked change took place in the other's demeanor on glancing at the card in his hand.

"Excuse me, sir," he said deferentially, "but, of course, I didn't know who I was speaking to. We all have instructions to give you every assistance."

"Is Mr. Guthrie in his room?"

"He's been in his room for some time, sir. You will want to get there without being seen? This way. We can join the lift on the third floor."

Off we went again, with our new guide. In the lift:

"Have you noticed anything suspicious about the place to-night?" asked Smith.

"I have!" was the startling reply. "That accounts for your finding me where you did. My usual post is in the lobby. But about eleven o'clock, when the theater people began to come in I had a hazy sort of impression that someone or something slipped past in the crowd--something that had no business in the hotel."

We got out of the lift.

"I don't quite follow you," said Smith. "If you thought you saw something entering, you must have formed a more or less definite impression regarding it."

"That's the funny part of the business," answered the man doggedly. "I didn't! But as I stood at the top of the stairs I could have sworn that there was something crawling up behind a party-- two ladies and two gentlemen."

"A dog, for instance?"

"It didn't strike me as being a dog, sir. Anyway, when the party passed me, there was nothing there. Mind you, whatever it was, it hadn't come in by the front. I have made inquiries everywhere, but without result." He stopped abruptly. "No. 189--Mr. Guthrie's door, sir."

Smith knocked.

"Hallo!" came a muffled voice; "what do you want?"

"Open the door! Don't delay; it is important."

He turned to the hotel detective.

"Stay right there where you can watch the stairs and the lift," he instructed; "and note everyone and everything that passes this door. But whatever you see or hear, do nothing without my orders."

The man moved off, and the door was opened. Smith whispered in my ear:

"Some creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu is in the hotel!"

Mr. Graham Guthrie, British resident in North Bhutan, was a big, thick-set man--gray-haired and florid, with widely opened eyes of the true fighting blue, a bristling mustache and prominent shaggy brows. Nayland Smith introduced himself tersely, proffering his card and an open letter.

"Those are my credentials, Mr. Guthrie," he said; "so no doubt you will realize that the business which brings me and my friend, Dr. Petrie, here at such an hour is of the first importance."

He switched off the light.

"There is no time for ceremony," he explained. "It is now twenty-five minutes past twelve. At half-past an attempt will be made upon your life!"

"Mr. Smith," said the other, who, arrayed in his pajamas, was seated on the edge of the bed, "you alarm me very greatly. I may mention that I was advised of your presence in England this morning."

"Do you know anything respecting the person called Fu-Manchu--Dr. Fu-Manchu?"

"Only what I was told to-day--that he is the agent of an advanced political group."

"It is opposed to his interests that you should return to Bhutan. A more gullible agent would be preferable. Therefore, unless you implicitly obey my instructions, you will never leave England!"

Graham Guthrie breathed quickly. I was growing more used to the gloom, and I could dimly discern him, his face turned towards Nayland Smith, whilst with his hand he clutched the bed-rail. Such a visit as ours, I think, must have shaken the nerve of any man.

"But, Mr. Smith," he said, "surely I am safe enough here! The place is full of American visitors at present, and I have had to be content with a room right at the top; so that the only danger I apprehend is that of fire."

"There is another danger," replied Smith. "The fact that you are at the top of the building enhances that danger. Do you recall anything of the mysterious epidemic which broke out in Rangoon in 1908--the deaths due to the Call of Siva?"

"I read of it in the Indian papers," said Guthrie uneasily. "Suicides, were they not?" "No!" snapped Smith. "Murders!"

There was a brief silence.

"From what I recall of the cases," said Guthrie, "that seems impossible. In several instances the victims threw themselves from the windows of locked rooms--and the windows were quite inaccessible."

"Exactly," replied Smith; and in the dim light his revolver gleamed dully, as he placed it on the small table beside the bed. "Except that your door is unlocked, the conditions to-night are identical. Silence, please, I hear a clock striking."

It was Big Ben. It struck the half-hour, leaving the stillness complete. In that room, high above the activity which yet prevailed below, high above the supping crowds in the hotel, high above the starving crowds on the Embankment, a curious chill of isolation swept about me. Again I realized how, in the very heart of the great metropolis, a man may be as far from aid as in the heart of a desert. I was glad that I was not alone in that room--marked with the death-mark of Fu-Manchu; and I am certain that Graham Guthrie welcomed his unexpected company.

I may have mentioned the fact before, but on this occasion it became so peculiarly evident to me that I am constrained to record it here--I refer to the sense of impending danger which invariably preceded a visit from Fu-Manchu. Even had I not known that an attempt was to be made that night, I should have realized it, as, strung to high tension, I waited in the darkness. Some invisible herald went ahead of the dreadful Chinaman, proclaiming his coming to every nerve in one's body. It was like a breath of astral incense, announcing the presence of the priests of death.

A wail, low but singularly penetrating, falling in minor cadences to a new silence, came from somewhere close at hand.

"My God!" hissed Guthrie, "what was that?"

"The Call of Siva," whispered Smith.

"Don't stir, for your life!"

Guthrie was breathing hard.

I knew that we were three; that the hotel detective was within hail; that there was a telephone in the room; that the traffic of the Embankment moved almost beneath us; but I knew, and am not ashamed to confess, that King Fear had icy fingers about my heart. It was awful--that tense waiting--for--what?

Three taps sounded--very distinctly upon the window.

Graham Guthrie started so as to shake the bed.

"It's supernatural!" he muttered--all that was Celtic in his blood recoiling from the omen. "Nothing human can reach that window!" "S-sh!" from Smith. "Don't stir."

The tapping was repeated.

Smith softly crossed the room. My heart was beating painfully. He threw open the window. Further inaction was impossible. I joined him; and we looked out into the empty air.

"Don't come too near, Petrie!" he warned over his shoulder.

One on either side of the open window, we stood and looked down at the moving Embankment lights, at the glitter of the Thames, at the silhouetted buildings on the farther bank, with the Shot Tower starting above them all.

Three taps sounded on the panes above us.

In all my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu I had had to face nothing so uncanny as this. What Burmese ghoulish had he loosed? Was it outside, in the air? Was it actually in the room?

"Don't let me go, Petrie!" whispered Smith suddenly. "Get a tight hold on me!"

That was the last straw; for I thought that some dreadful fascination was impelling my friend to hurl himself out! Wildly I threw my arms about him, and Guthrie leaped forward to help.

Smith leaned from the window and looked up.

One choking cry he gave--smothered, inarticulate--and I found him slipping from my grip--being drawn out of the window--drawn to his death!

"Hold him, Guthrie!" I gasped hoarsely. "My God, he's going! Hold him!"

My friend writhed in our grasp, and I saw him stretch his arm upward. The crack of his revolver came, and he collapsed on to the floor, carrying me with him.

But as I fell I heard a scream above. Smith's revolver went hurtling through the air, and, hard upon it, went a black shape--flashing past the open window into the gulf of the night.

"The light! The light!" I cried.

Guthrie ran and turned on the light. Nayland Smith, his eyes starting from his head, his face swollen, lay plucking at a silken cord which showed tight about his throat.

"It was a Thug!" screamed Guthrie. "Get the rope off! He's choking!"

My hands a-twitch, I seized the strangling-cord.

"A knife! Quick!" I cried. "I have lost mine!"

Guthrie ran to the dressing-table and passed me an open penknife. I somehow forced the blade between the rope and Smith's swollen neck, and severed the deadly silken thing.

Smith made a choking noise, and fell back, swooning in my arms.

When, later, we stood looking down upon the mutilated thing which had been brought in from where it fell, Smith showed me a mark on the brow-- close beside the wound where his bullet had entered.

"The mark of Kali," he said. "The man was a phansigar--a religious strangler. Since Fu-Manchu has dacoits in his service I might have expected that he would have Thugs. A group of these fiends would seem to have fled into Burma; so that the mysterious epidemic in Rangoon was really an outbreak of thuggee--on slightly improved lines! I had suspected something of the kind but, naturally, I had not looked for Thugs near Rangoon. My unexpected resistance led the strangler to bungle the rope. You have seen how it was fastened about my throat? That was unscientific. The true method, as practiced by the group operating in Burma, was to throw the line about the victim's neck and jerk him from the window. A man leaning from an open window is very nicely poised: it requires only a slight jerk to pitch him forward. No loop was used, but a running line, which, as the victim fell, remained in the hand of the murderer. No clew! Therefore we see at once what commended the system to Fu-Manchu."

Graham Guthrie, very pale, stood looking down at the dead strangler.

"I owe you my life, Mr. Smith," he said. "If you had come five minutes later--"

He grasped Smith's hand.

"You see," Guthrie continued, "no one thought of looking for a Thug in Burma! And no one thought of the ROOF! These fellows are as active as monkeys, and where an ordinary man would infallibly break his neck, they are entirely at home. I might have chosen my room especially for the business!"

"He slipped in late this evening," said Smith. "The hotel detective saw him, but these stranglers are as elusive as shadows, otherwise, despite their having changed the scene of their operations, not one could have survived."

"Didn't you mention a case of this kind on the Irrawaddy?" I asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "and I know of what you are thinking. The steamers of the Irrawaddy flotilla have a corrugated-iron roof over the top deck. The Thug must have been lying up there as the Colassie passed on the deck below."

"But, Smith, what is the motive of the Call?" I continued.

"Partly religious," he explained, "and partly to wake the victims! You are perhaps going to ask me how Dr. Fu-Manchu has obtained power over such people as phansigars? I can only reply that Dr. Fu-Manchu has secret knowledge of which, so far, we know absolutely nothing; but, despite all, at last I begin to score."

"You do," I agreed; "but your victory took you near to death."

"I owe my life to you, Petrie," he said. "Once to your strength of arm, and once to--"

"Don't speak of her, Smith," I interrupted. "Dr. Fu-Manchu may have discovered the part she played! In which event--"

"God help her!"

CHAPTER 16

UPON the following day we were afoot again, and shortly at handgrips with the enemy. In retrospect, that restless time offers a chaotic prospect, with no peaceful spot amid its turmoils.

All that was reposeful in nature seemed to have become an irony and a mockery to us--who knew how an evil demigod had his sacrificial altars amid our sweetest groves. This idea ruled strongly in my mind upon that soft autumnal day.

"The net is closing in," said Nayland Smith.

"Let us hope upon a big catch," I replied, with a laugh.

Beyond where the Thames tided slumberously seaward showed the roofs of Royal Windsor, the castle towers showing through the autumn haze. The peace of beautiful Thames-side was about us.

This was one of the few tangible clues upon which thus far we had chanced; but at last it seemed indeed that we were narrowing the resources of that enemy of the white race who was writing his name over England in characters of blood. To capture Dr. Fu-Manchu we did not hope; but at least there was every promise of destroying one of the enemy's strongholds.

We had circled upon the map a tract of country cut by the Thames, with Windsor for its center. Within that circle was the house from which miraculously we had escaped--a house used by the most highly organized group in the history of criminology. So much we knew. Even if we found the house, and this was likely enough, to find it vacated by Fu-Manchu and his mysterious servants we were prepared. But it would be a base destroyed.

We were working upon a methodical plan, and although our cooperators were invisible, these numbered no fewer than twelve--all of them experienced men. Thus far we had drawn blank, but the place for which Smith and I were making now came clearly into view: an old mansion situated in extensive walled grounds. Leaving the river behind us, we turned sharply to the right along a lane flanked by a high wall. On an open patch of ground, as we passed, I noted a gypsy caravan. An old woman was seated on the steps, her wrinkled face bent, her chin resting in the palm of her hand.

I scarcely glanced at her, but pressed on, nor did I notice that my friend no longer was beside me. I was all anxiety to come to some point from whence I might obtain a view of the house; all anxiety to know if this was the abode of our mysterious enemy--the place where he worked amid his weird company, where he bred his deadly scorpions and his bacilli, reared his poisonous fungi, from whence he dispatched his murder ministers. Above all, perhaps, I wondered if this would prove to be the hiding-place of the beautiful slave girl who was such a potent factor in the Doctor's plans, but a two-edged sword which yet we hoped to turn upon Fu-Manchu. Even in the hands of a master, a woman's beauty is a dangerous weapon.

A cry rang out behind me. I turned quickly. And a singular sight met my gaze.

Nayland Smith was engaged in a furious struggle with the old gypsy woman! His long arms clasped about her, he was roughly dragging her out into the roadway, she fighting like a wild thing--silently, fiercely.

Smith often surprised me, but at that sight, frankly, I thought that he was become bereft of reason. I ran back; and I had almost reached the scene of this incredible contest, and Smith now

was evidently hard put to it to hold his own when a man, swarthy, with big rings in his ears, leaped from the caravan.

One quick glance he threw in our direction, and made off towards the river.

Smith twisted round upon me, never releasing his hold of the woman.

"After him, Petrie!" he cried. "After him. Don't let him escape. It's a dacoit!"

My brain in a confused whirl; my mind yet disposed to a belief that my friend had lost his senses, the word "dacoit" was sufficient.

I started down the road after the fleetly running man. Never once did he glance behind him, so that he evidently had occasion to fear pursuit. The dusty road rang beneath my flying footsteps. That sense of fantasy, which claimed me often enough in those days of our struggle with the titanic genius whose victory meant the victory of the yellow races over the white, now had me fast in its grip again. I was an actor in one of those dream-scenes of the grim Fu-Manchu drama.

Out over the grass and down to the river's brink ran the gypsy who was no gypsy, but one of that far more sinister brotherhood, the dacoits. I was close upon his heels. But I was not prepared for him to leap in among the rushes at the margin of the stream; and seeing him do this I pulled up quickly. Straight into the water he plunged; and I saw that he held some object in his hand. He waded out; he dived; and as I gained the bank and looked to right and left he had vanished completely. Only ever--widening rings showed where he had been. I had him.

For directly he rose to the surface he would be visible from either bank, and with the police whistle which I carried I could, if necessary, summon one of the men in hiding across the stream. I waited. A wild-fowl floated serenely past, untroubled by this strange invasion of his precincts. A full minute I waited. From the lane behind me came Smith's voice:

"Don't let him escape, Petrie!"

Never lifting my eyes from the water, I waved my hand reassuringly. But still the dacoit did not rise. I searched the surface in all directions as far as my eyes could reach; but no swimmer showed above it. Then it was that I concluded he had dived too deeply, become entangled in the weeds and was drowned. With a final glance to right and left and some feeling of awe at this sudden tragedy-- this grim going out of a life at glorious noonday--I turned away. Smith had the woman securely; but I had not taken five steps towards him when a faint splash behind warned me. Instinctively I ducked. From whence that saving instinct arose I cannot surmise, but to it I owed my life. For as I rapidly lowered my head, something hummed past me, something that flew out over the grass bank, and fell with a jangle upon the dusty roadside. A knife!

I turned and bounded back to the river's brink. I heard a faint cry behind me, which could only have come from the gypsy woman. Nothing disturbed the calm surface of the water. The reach was lonely of rowers. Out by the farther bank a girl was poling a punt along, and her white-clad figure was the only living thing that moved upon the river within the range of the most expert knife-thrower.

To say that I was nonplused is to say less than the truth; I was amazed. That it was the dacoit who had shown me this murderous attention I could not doubt. But where in Heaven's name WAS he? He could not humanly have remained below water for so long; yet he certainly was not above, was not upon the surface, concealed amongst the reeds, nor hidden upon the bank.

There, in the bright sunshine, a consciousness of the eerie possessed me. It was with an uncomfortable feeling that my phantom foe might be aiming a second knife at my back that I turned away and hastened towards Smith. My fearful expectations were not realized, and I picked up the little weapon which had so narrowly missed me, and with it in my hand rejoined my friend.

He was standing with one arm closely clasped about the apparently exhausted woman, and her dark eyes were fixed upon him with an extraordinary expression.

"What does it mean, Smith?" I began.

But he interrupted me.

"Where is the dacoit?" he demanded rapidly.

"Since he seemingly possesses the attributes of a fish," I replied, "I cannot pretend to say."

The gypsy woman lifted her eyes to mine and laughed. Her laughter was musical, not that of such an old hag as Smith held captive; it was familiar, too.

I started and looked closely into the wizened face.

"He's tricked you," said Smith, an angry note in his voice. "What is that you have in your hand?"

I showed him the knife, and told him how it had come into my possession.

"I know," he rapped. "I saw it. He was in the water not three yards from where you stood. You must have seen him. Was there nothing visible?"

"Nothing."

The woman laughed again, and again I wondered.

"A wild-fowl," I added; "nothing else."

"A wild-fowl," snapped Smith. "If you will consult your recollections of the habits of wild-fowl you will see that this particular specimen was a RARA AVIS. It's an old trick, Petrie, but a good one, for it is used in decoying. A dacoit's head was concealed in that wild-fowl! It's useless. He has certainly made good his escape by now."

"Smith," I said, somewhat crestfallen, "why are you detaining this gypsy woman?"

"Gypsy woman!" he laughed, hugging her tightly as she made an impatient movement.

"Use your eyes, old man."

He jerked the frowsy wig from her head, and beneath was a cloud of disordered hair that shimmered in the sunlight.

"A wet sponge will do the rest," he said.

Into my eyes, widely opened in wonder, looked the dark eyes of the captive; and beneath the disguise I picked out the charming features of the slave girl. There were tears on the whitened lashes, and she was submissive now.

"This time," said my friend hardly, "we have fairly captured her--and we will hold her."

From somewhere up-stream came a faint call.

"The dacoit!"

Nayland Smith's lean body straightened; he stood alert, strung up.

Another call answered, and a third responded. Then followed the flatly shrill note of a police whistle, and I noted a column of black vapor rising beyond the wall, mounting straight to heaven as the smoke of a welcome offering.

The surrounded mansion was in flames!

"Curse it!" rapped Smith. "So this time we were right. But, of course, he has had ample opportunity to remove his effects. I knew that. The man's daring is incredible. He has given himself till the very last moment--and we blundered upon two of the outposts."

"I lost one."

"No matter. We have the other. I expect no further arrests, and the house will have been so well fired by the Doctor's servants that nothing can save it. I fear its ashes will afford us no clew, Petrie; but we have secured a lever which should serve to disturb Fu-Manchu's world."

He glanced at the queer figure which hung submissively in his arms. She looked up proudly.

"You need not hold me so tight," she said, in her soft voice. "I will come with you."

That I moved amid singular happenings, you, who have borne with me thus far, have learned, and that I witnessed many curious scenes; but of the many such scenes in that race--drama wherein Nayland Smith and Dr. Fu-Manchu played the leading parts, I remember none more bizarre than the one at my rooms that afternoon.

Without delay, and without taking the Scotland Yard men into our confidence, we had hurried our prisoner back to London, for my friend's authority was supreme. A strange trio we were, and one which excited no little comment; but the journey came to an end at last. Now we were in my unpretentious sitting-room--the room wherein Smith first had unfolded to me the story of Dr. Fu-Manchu and of the great secret society which sought to upset the balance of the world--to place Europe and America beneath the scepter of Cathay.

I sat with my elbows upon the writing-table, my chin in my hands; Smith restlessly paced the floor, relighting his blackened briar a dozen times in as many minutes. In the big arm-chair the pseudogypsy was curled up. A brief toilet had converted the wizened old woman's face into that of a fascinatingly pretty girl. Wildly picturesque she looked in her ragged Romany garb. She held a cigarette in her fingers and watched us through lowered lashes.

Seemingly, with true Oriental fatalism, she was quite reconciled to her fate, and ever and anon she would bestow upon me a glance from her beautiful eyes which few men, I say with confidence, could have sustained unmoved. Though I could not be blind to the emotions of that passionate Eastern soul, yet I strove not to think of them. Accomplice of an arch-murderer she might be; but she was dangerously lovely.

"That man who was with you," said Smith, suddenly turning upon her, "was in Burma up till quite recently. He murdered a fisherman thirty miles above Prome only a month before I left. The D.S.P. had placed a thousand rupees on his head. Am I right?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Suppose--What then?" she asked.

"Suppose I handed you over to the police?" suggested Smith. But he spoke without conviction, for in the recent past we both had owed our lives to this girl.

"As you please," she replied. "The police would learn nothing."

"You do not belong to the Far East," my friend said abruptly. "You may have Eastern blood in your veins, but you are no kin of Fu-Manchu."

"That is true," she admitted, and knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"Will you tell me where to find Fu-Manchu?"

She shrugged her shoulders again, glancing eloquently in my direction.

Smith walked to the door.

"I must make out my report, Petrie," he said. "Look after the prisoner."

And as the door closed softly behind him I knew what was expected of me; but, honestly, I shirked my responsibility. What attitude should I adopt? How should I go about my delicate task? In a quandary, I stood watching the girl whom singular circumstances saw captive in my rooms.

"You do not think we would harm you?" I began awkwardly. "No harm shall come to you. Why will you not trust us?"

She raised her brilliant eyes.

"Of what avail has your protection been to some of those others," she said; "those others whom HE has sought for?"

Alas! it had been of none, and I knew it well. I thought I grasped the drift of her words.

"You mean that if you speak, Fu-Manchu will find a way of killing you?"

"Of killing ME!" she flashed scornfully. "Do I seem one to fear for myself?"

"Then what do you fear?" I asked, in surprise.

She looked at me oddly.

"When I was seized and sold for a slave," she answered slowly, "my sister was taken, too, and my brother--a child." She spoke the word with a tender intonation, and her slight accent rendered it the more soft. "My sister died in the desert. My brother lived. Better, far better, that he had died, too."

Her words impressed me intensely.

"Of what are you speaking?" I questioned. "You speak of slave-raids, of the desert. Where did these things take place? Of what country are you?"

"Does it matter?" she questioned in turn. "Of what country am I? A slave has no country, no name."

"No name!" I cried.

"You may call me Karamaneh," she said. "As Karamaneh I was sold to Dr. Fu-Manchu, and my brother also he purchased. We were cheap at the price he paid." She laughed shortly, wildly.

"But he has spent a lot of money to educate me. My brother is all that is left to me in the world to love, and he is in the power of Dr. Fu-Manchu. You understand? It is upon him the blow will fall. You ask me to fight against Fu-Manchu. You talk of protection. Did your protection save Sir Crichton Davey?"

I shook my head sadly.

"You understand now why I cannot disobey my master's orders--why, if I would, I dare not betray him."

I walked to the window and looked out. How could I answer her arguments? What could I say? I heard the rustle of her ragged skirts, and she who called herself Karamaneh stood beside me. She laid her hand upon my arm.

"Let me go," she pleaded. "He will kill him! He will kill him!"

Her voice shook with emotion.

"He cannot revenge himself upon your brother when you are in no way to blame," I said angrily. "We arrested you; you are not here of your own free will."

She drew her breath sharply, clutching at my arm, and in her eyes I could read that she was forcing her mind to some arduous decision.

"Listen." She was speaking rapidly, nervously. "If I help you to take Dr. Fu-Manchu--tell you where he is to be found ALONE--will you promise me, solemnly promise me, that you will immediately go to the place where I shall guide you and release my brother; that you will let us both go free?"

"I will," I said, without hesitation. "You may rest assured of it."

"But there is a condition," she added.

"What is it?"

"When I have told you where to capture him you must release me."

I hesitated. Smith often had accused me of weakness where this girl was concerned. What now was my plain duty? That she would utterly decline to speak under any circumstances unless it suited her to do so I felt assured. If she spoke the truth, in her proposed bargain there was no personal element; her conduct I now viewed in a new light. Humanity, I thought, dictated that I accept her proposal; policy also.

"I agree," I said, and looked into her eyes, which were aflame now with emotion, an excitement perhaps of anticipation, perhaps of fear.

She laid her hands upon my shoulders.

"You will be careful?" she said pleadingly.

"For your sake," I replied, "I shall."

"Not for my sake."

"Then for your brother's."

"No." Her voice had sunk to a whisper. "For your own."