

CHAPTER 17

A COOL breeze met us, blowing from the lower reaches of the Thames. Far behind us twinkled the dim lights of Low's Cottages, the last regular habitations abutting upon the marshes. Between us and the cottages stretched half-a-mile of lush land through which at this season there were, however, numerous dry paths. Before us the flats again, a dull, monotonous expanse beneath the moon, with the promise of the cool breeze that the river flowed round the bend ahead. It was very quiet. Only the sound of our footsteps, as Nayland Smith and I tramped steadily towards our goal, broke the stillness of that lonely place.

Not once but many times, within the last twenty minutes, I had thought that we were ill-advised to adventure alone upon the capture of the formidable Chinese doctor; but we were following out our compact with Karamaneh; and one of her stipulations had been that the police must not be acquainted with her share in the matter.

A light came into view far ahead of us.

"That's the light, Petrie," said Smith. "If we keep that straight before us, according to our information we shall strike the hulk."

I grasped the revolver in my pocket, and the presence of the little weapon was curiously reassuring. I have endeavored, perhaps in extenuation of my own fears, to explain how about Dr. Fu-Manchu there rested an atmosphere of horror, peculiar, unique. He was not as other men. The dread that he inspired in all with whom he came in contact, the terrors which he controlled and hurled at whomsoever cumbered his path, rendered him an object supremely sinister. I despair of conveying to those who may read this account any but the coldest conception of the man's evil power.

Smith stopped suddenly and grasped my arm. We stood listening. "What?" I asked.

"You heard nothing?"

I shook my head.

Smith was peering back over the marshes in his oddly alert way. He turned to me, and his tanned face wore a peculiar expression.

"You don't think it's a trap?" he jerked. "We are trusting her blindly."

Strange it may seem, but something within me rose in arms against the innuendo.

"I don't," I said shortly.

He nodded. We pressed on.

Ten minutes' steady tramping brought us within sight of the Thames. Smith and I both had noticed how Fu-Manchu's activities centered always about the London river. Undoubtedly it was his highway, his line of communication, along which he moved his mysterious forces. The opium den off Shadwell Highway, the mansion upstream, at that hour a smoldering shell; now the hulk lying off the marshes. Always he made his headquarters upon the river. It was significant; and even if to-night's expedition should fail, this was a clew for our future guidance.

"Bear to the right," directed Smith. "We must reconnoiter before making our attack."

We took a path that led directly to the river bank. Before us lay the gray expanse of water, and out upon it moved the busy shipping of the great mercantile city. But this life of the river seemed widely removed from us. The lonely spot where we stood had no kinship with

human activity. Its dreariness illuminated by the brilliant moon, it looked indeed a fit setting for an act in such a drama as that wherein we played our parts. When I had lain in the East End opium den, when upon such another night as this I had looked out upon a peaceful Norfolk countryside, the same knowledge of aloofness, of utter detachment from the world of living men, had come to me.

Silently Smith stared out at the distant moving lights.

"Karamaneh merely means a slave," he said irrelevantly.

I made no comment.

"There's the hulk," he added.

The bank upon which we stood dipped in mud slopes to the level of the running tide. Seaward it rose higher, and by a narrow inlet-- for we perceived that we were upon a kind of promontory-- a rough pier showed. Beneath it was a shadowy shape in the patch of gloom which the moon threw far out upon the softly eddying water. Only one dim light was visible amid this darkness.

"That will be the cabin," said Smith.

Acting upon our prearranged plan, we turned and walked up on to the staging above the hulk. A wooden ladder led out and down to the deck below, and was loosely lashed to a ring on the pier. With every motion of the tidal waters the ladder rose and fell, its rings creaking harshly, against the crazy railing.

"How are we going to get down without being detected?" whispered Smith.

"We've got to risk it," I said grimly.

Without further words my friend climbed around on to the ladder and commenced to descend. I waited until his head disappeared below the level, and, clumsily enough, prepared to follow him.

The hulk at that moment giving an unusually heavy heave, I stumbled, and for one breathless moment looked down upon the glittering surface streaking the darkness beneath me. My foot had slipped, and but that I had a firm grip upon the top rung, that instant, most probably, had marked the end of my share in the fight with Fu-Manchu. As it was I had a narrow escape. I felt something slip from my hip pocket, but the weird creaking of the ladder, the groans of the laboring hulk, and the lapping of the waves about the staging drowned the sound of the splash as my revolver dropped into the river.

Rather, white-faced, I think, I joined Smith on the deck. He had witnessed my accident, but--

"We must risk it," he whispered in my ear. "We dare not turn back now."

He plunged into the semi-darkness, making for the cabin, I perforce following.

At the bottom of the ladder we came fully into the light streaming out from the singular apartments at the entrance to which we found ourselves. It was fitted up as a laboratory. A glimpse I had of shelves loaded with jars and bottles, of a table strewn with scientific paraphernalia, with retorts, with tubes of extraordinary shapes, holding living organisms, and with instruments--some of them of a form unknown to my experience. I saw too that books, papers and rolls of parchment littered the bare wooden floor. Then Smith's voice rose above the confused sounds about me, incisive, commanding:

"I have you covered, Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

For Fu-Manchu sat at the table.

The picture that he presented at that moment is one which persistently clings in my memory. In his long, yellow robe, his masklike, intellectual face bent forward amongst the riot of singular objects upon the table, his great, high brow gleaming in the light of the shaded lamp above him, and with the abnormal eyes, filmed and green, raised to us, he seemed a figure from the realms of delirium. But, most amazing circumstance of all, he and his surroundings tallied, almost identically, with the dream-picture which had come to me as I lay chained in the cell!

Some of the large jars about the place held anatomy specimens. A faint smell of opium hung in the air, and playing with the tassel of one of the cushions upon which, as upon a divan, Fu-Manchu was seated, leaped and chattered a little marmoset.

That was an electric moment. I was prepared for anything-- for anything except for what really happened.

The doctor's wonderful, evil face betrayed no hint of emotion. The lids flickered over the filmed eyes, and their greenness grew momentarily brighter, and filmed over again.

"Put up your hands!" rapped Smith, "and attempt no tricks." His voice quivered with excitement. "The game's up, Fu-Manchu. Find something to tie him up with, Petrie."

I moved forward to Smith's side, and was about to pass him in the narrow doorway. The hulk moved beneath our feet like a living thing groaning, creaking--and the water lapped about the rotten woodwork with a sound infinitely dreary.

"Put up your hands!" ordered Smith imperatively.

Fu-Manchu slowly raised his hands, and a smile dawned upon the impassive features--a smile that had no mirth in it, only menace, revealing as it did his even, discolored teeth, but leaving the filmed eyes inanimate, dull, inhuman.

He spoke softly, sibilantly.

"I would advise Dr. Petrie to glance behind him before he moves."

Smith's keen gray eyes never for a moment quitted the speaker. The gleaming barrel moved not a hair's-breadth. But I glanced quickly over my shoulder--and stifled a cry of pure horror.

A wicked, pock-marked face, with wolfish fangs bared, and jaundiced eyes squinting obliquely into mine, was within two inches of me. A lean, brown hand and arm, the great thews standing up like cords, held a crescent-shaped knife a fraction of an inch above my jugular vein. A slight movement must have dispatched me; a sweep of the fearful weapon, I doubt not, would have severed my head from my body.

"Smith!" I whispered hoarsely, "don't look around. For God's sake keep him covered. But a dacoit has his knife at my throat!"

Then, for the first time, Smith's hand trembled. But his glance never wavered from the malignant, emotionless countenance of Dr. Fu-Manchu. He clenched his teeth hard, so that the muscles stood out prominently upon his jaw.

I suppose that silence which followed my awful discovery prevailed but a few seconds. To me those seconds were each a lingering death.

There, below, in that groaning hulk, I knew more of icy terror than any of our meetings with the murder-group had brought to me before; and through my brain throbbed a thought: the girl had betrayed us!

"You supposed that I was alone?" suggested Fu-Manchu. "So I was."

Yet no trace of fear had broken through the impassive yellow mask when we had entered.

"But my faithful servant followed you," he added. "I thank him. The honors, Mr. Smith, are mine, I think?"

Smith made no reply. I divined that he was thinking furiously. Fu-Manchu moved his hand to caress the marmoset, which had leaped playfully upon his shoulder, and crouched there gibing at us in a whistling voice.

"Don't stir!" said Smith savagely. "I warn you!"

Fu-Manchu kept his hand raised.

"May I ask you how you discovered my retreat?" he asked.

"This hulk has been watched since dawn," lied Smith brazenly.

"So?" The Doctor's filmed eyes cleared for a moment. "And to-day you compelled me to burn a house, and you have captured one of my people, too. I congratulate you. She would not betray me though lashed with scorpions."

The great gleaming knife was so near to my neck that a sheet of notepaper could scarcely have been slipped between blade and vein, I think; but my heart throbbed even more wildly when I heard those words.

"An impasse," said Fu-Manchu. "I have a proposal to make. I assume that you would not accept my word for anything?"

"I would not," replied Smith promptly.

"Therefore," pursued the Chinaman, and the occasional guttural alone marred his perfect English, "I must accept yours. Of your resources outside this cabin I know nothing. You, I take it, know as little of mine. My Burmese friend and Doctor Petrie will lead the way, then; you and I will follow. We will strike out across the marsh for, say, three hundred yards. You will then place your pistol on the ground, pledging me your word to leave it there. I shall further require your assurance that you will make no attempt upon me until I have retraced my steps. I and my good servant will withdraw, leaving you, at the expiration of the specified period, to act as you see fit. Is it agreed?"

Smith hesitated. Then:

"The dacoit must leave his knife also," he stipulated. Fu-Manchu smiled his evil smile again.

"Agreed. Shall I lead the way?"

"No!" rapped Smith. "Petrie and the dacoit first; then you; I last."

A guttural word of command from Fu-Manchu, and we left the cabin, with its evil odors, its mortuary specimens, and its strange instruments, and in the order arranged mounted to the deck.

"It will be awkward on the ladder," said Fu-Manchu. "Dr. Petrie, I will accept your word to adhere to the terms."

"I promise," I said, the words almost choking me.

We mounted the rising and dipping ladder, all reached the pier, and strode out across the flats, the Chinaman always under close cover of Smith's revolver. Round about our feet, now leaping ahead, now gamboling back, came and went the marmoset. The dacoit, dressed solely in a dark loin-cloth, walked beside me, carrying his huge knife, and sometimes glancing at me with his blood-lustful eyes. Never before, I venture to say, had an autumn moon lighted such a scene in that place.

"Here we part," said Fu-Manchu, and spoke another word to his follower.

The man threw his knife upon the ground.

"Search him, Petrie," directed Smith. "He may have a second concealed."

The Doctor consented; and I passed my hands over the man's scanty garments.

"Now search Fu-Manchu."

This also I did. And never have I experienced a similar sense of revulsion from any human being. I shuddered, as though I had touched a venomous reptile.

Smith drew down his revolver.

"I curse myself for an honorable fool," he said. "No one could dispute my right to shoot you dead where you stand."

Knowing him as I did, I could tell from the suppressed passion in Smith's voice that only by his unhesitating acceptance of my friend's word, and implicit faith in his keeping it, had Dr. Fu-Manchu escaped just retribution at that moment. Fiend though he was, I admired his courage; for all this he, too, must have known.

The Doctor turned, and with the dacoit walked back. Nayland Smith's next move filled me with surprise. For just as, silently, I was thanking God for my escape, my friend began shedding his coat, collar and waistcoat.

"Pocket your valuables, and do the same," he muttered hoarsely. "We have a poor chances but we are both fairly fit. To-night, Petrie, we literally have to run for our lives."

We live in a peaceful age, wherein it falls to the lot of few men to owe their survival to their fleetness of foot. At Smith's words I realized in a flash that such was to be our fate to-night.

I have said that the hulk lay off a sort of promontory. East and west, then, we had nothing to hope for. To the south was Fu-Manchu; and even as, stripped of our heavier garments, we started to run northward, the weird signal of a dacoit rose on the night and was answered--was answered again.

"Three, at least," hissed Smith; "three armed dacoits. Hopeless."

"Take the revolver," I cried. "Smith, it's--"

"No," he rapped, through clenched teeth. "A servant of the Crown in the East makes his motto: 'Keep your word, though it break your neck!' I don't think we need fear it being used against us. Fu-Manchu avoids noisy methods."

So back we ran, over the course by which, earlier, we had come. It was, roughly, a mile to the first building--a deserted cottage-- and another quarter of a mile to any that was occupied.

Our chance of meeting a living soul, other than Fu-Manchu's dacoits, was practically nil.

At first we ran easily, for it was the second half-mile that would decide our fate. The professional murderers who pursued us ran like panthers, I knew; and I dare not allow my mind to dwell upon those yellow figures with the curved, gleaming, knives. For a long time neither of us looked back.

On we ran, and on--silently, doggedly.

Then a hissing breath from Smith warned me what to expect.

Should I, too, look back? Yes. It was impossible to resist the horrid fascination.

I threw a quick glance over my shoulder.

And never while I live shall I forget what I saw. Two of the pursuing dacoits had outdistanced their fellow (or fellows), and were actually within three hundred yards of us.

More like dreadful animals they looked than human beings, running bent forward, with their faces curiously uptilted. The brilliant moonlight gleamed upon bared teeth, as I could see,

even at that distance, even in that quick, agonized glance, and it gleamed upon the crescent-shaped knives.

"As hard as you can go now," panted Smith. "We must make an attempt to break into the empty cottage. Only chance."

I had never in my younger days been a notable runner; for Smith I cannot speak. But I am confident that the next half-mile was done in time that would not have disgraced a crack man. Not once again did either of us look back. Yard upon yard we raced forward together. My heart seemed to be bursting. My leg muscles throbbed with pain. At last, with the empty cottage in sight, it came to that pass with me when another three yards looks as unattainable as three miles. Once I stumbled.

"My God!" came from Smith weakly.

But I recovered myself. Bare feet pattered close upon our heels, and panting breaths told how even Fu-Manchu's bloodhounds were hard put to it by the killing pace we had made.

"Smith," I whispered, "look in front. Someone!"

As through a red mist I had seen a dark shape detach itself from the shadows of the cottage, and merge into them again. It could only be another dacoit; but Smith, not heeding, or not hearing, my faintly whispered words, crashed open the gate and hurled himself blindly at the door.

It burst open before him with a resounding boom, and he pitched forward into the interior darkness. Flat upon the floor he lay, for as, with a last effort, I gained the threshold and dragged myself within, I almost fell over his recumbent body.

Madly I snatched at the door. His foot held it open. I kicked the foot away, and banged the door to. As I turned, the leading dacoit, his eyes starting from their sockets, his face the face of a demon leaped wildly through the gateway.

That Smith had burst the latch I felt assured, but by some divine accident my weak hands found the bolt. With the last ounce of strength spared to me I thrust it home in the rusty socket--as a full six inches of shining steel split the middle panel and protruded above my head.

I dropped, sprawling, beside my friend.

A terrific blow shattered every pane of glass in the solitary window, and one of the grinning animal faces looked in.

"Sorry, old man," whispered Smith, and his voice was barely audible. Weakly he grasped my hand. "My fault. I shouldn't have let, you come."

From the corner of the room where the black shadows lay flicked a long tongue of flame. Muffled, staccato, came the report. And the yellow face at the window was blotted out.

One wild cry, ending in a rattling gasp, told of a dacoit gone to his account.

A gray figure glided past me and was silhouetted against the broken window.

Again the pistol sent its message into the night, and again came the reply to tell how well and truly that message had been delivered. In the stillness, intense by sharp contrast, the sound of bare soles pattering upon the path outside stole to me. Two runners, I thought there were, so that four dacoits must have been upon our trail. The room was full of pungent smoke. I staggered to my feet as the gray figure with the revolver turned towards me. Something familiar there was in that long, gray garment, and now I perceived why I had thought so.

It was my gray rain-coat.

"Karamaneh," I whispered.

And Smith, with difficulty, supporting himself upright, and holding fast to the ledge beside the door, muttered something hoarsely, which sounded like "God bless her!"

The girl, trembling now, placed her hands upon my shoulders with that quaint, pathetic gesture peculiarly her own.

"I followed you," she said. "Did you not know I should follow you? But I had to hide because of another who was following also. I had but just reached this place when I saw you running towards me."

She broke off and turned to Smith.

"This is your pistol," she said naively. "I found it in your bag. Will you please take it!"

He took it without a word. Perhaps he could not trust himself to speak.

"Now go. Hurry!" she said. "You are not safe yet."

"But you?" I asked.

"You have failed," she replied. "I must go back to him. There is no other way."

Strangely sick at heart for a man who has just had a miraculous escape from death, I opened the door. Coatless, disheveled figures, my friend and I stepped out into the moonlight.

Hideous under the pale rays lay the two dead men, their glazed eyes upcast to the peace of the blue heavens. Karamaneh had shot to kill, for both had bullets in their brains. If God ever planned a more complex nature than hers--a nature more tumultuous with conflicting passions, I cannot conceive of it. Yet her beauty was of the sweetest; and in some respects she had the heart of a child--this girl who could shoot so straight.

"We must send the police to-night," said Smith. "Or the papers--"

"Hurry," came the girl's voice commandingly from the darkness of the cottage.

It was a singular situation. My very soul rebelled against it. But what could we do?

"Tell us where we can communicate," began Smith.

"Hurry. I shall be suspected. Do you want him to kill me!"

We moved away. All was very still now, and the lights glimmered faintly ahead. Not a wisp of cloud brushed the moon's disk.

"Good-night, Karamaneh," I whispered softly.

CHAPTER 18

TO pursue further the adventure on the marshes would be a task at once useless and thankless. In its actual and in its dramatic significance it concluded with our parting from Karamaneh. And in that parting I learned what Shakespeare meant by "Sweet Sorrow."

There was a world, I learned, upon the confines of which I stood, a world whose very existence hitherto had been unsuspected. Not the least of the mysteries which peeped from the darkness was the mystery of the heart of Karamaneh. I sought to forget her. I sought to remember her. Indeed, in the latter task I found one more congenial, yet, in the direction and extent of the ideas which it engendered, one that led me to a precipice.

East and West may not intermingle. As a student of world-policies, as a physician, I admitted, could not deny, that truth. Again, if Karamaneh were to be credited, she had come to Fu-Manchu a slave; had fallen into the hands of the raiders; had crossed the desert with the slave-drivers; had known the house of the slave-dealer. Could it be? With the fading of the crescent of Islam I had thought such things to have passed.

But if it were so?

At the mere thought of a girl so deliciously beautiful in the brutal power of slavers, I found myself grinding my teeth--closing my eyes in a futile attempt to blot out the pictures called up.

Then, at such times, I would find myself discrediting her story. Again, I would find myself wondering, vaguely, why such problems persistently haunted my mind. But, always, my heart had an answer. And I was a medical man, who sought to build up a family practice!-- who, in short, a very little time ago, had thought himself past the hot follies of youth and entered upon that staid phase of life wherein the daily problems of the medical profession hold absolute sway and such seductive follies as dark eyes and red lips find-- no place--are excluded!

But it is foreign from the purpose of this plain record to enlist sympathy for the recorder. The topic upon which, here, I have ventured to touch was one fascinating enough to me; I cannot hope that it holds equal charm for any other. Let us return to that which it is my duty to narrate and let us forget my brief digression.

It is a fact, singular, but true, that few Londoners know London. Under the guidance of my friend, Nayland Smith, I had learned, since his return from Burma, how there are haunts in the very heart of the metropolis whose existence is unsuspected by all but the few; places unknown even to the ubiquitous copy-hunting pressman.

Into a quiet thoroughfare not two minutes' walk from the pulsing life of Leicester Square, Smith led the way. Before a door sandwiched in between two dingy shop-fronts he paused and turned to me.

"Whatever you see or hear," he cautioned, "express no surprise."

A cab had dropped us at the corner. We both wore dark suits and fez caps with black silk tassels. My complexion had been artificially reduced to a shade resembling the deep tan of my friend's. He rang the bell beside the door.

Almost immediately it was opened by a negro woman--gross, hideously ugly.

Smith uttered something in voluble Arabic. As a linguist his attainments were a constant source of surprise. The jargons of the East, Far and Near, he spoke as his mother tongue. The

woman immediately displayed the utmost servility, ushering us into an ill-lighted passage, with every evidence of profound respect. Following this passage, and passing an inner door, from beyond whence proceeded bursts of discordant music, we entered a little room bare of furniture, with coarse matting for mural decorations, and a patternless red carpet on the floor. In a niche burned a common metal lamp.

The negress left us, and close upon her departure entered a very aged man with a long patriarchal beard, who greeted my friend with dignified courtesy. Following a brief conversation, the aged Arab--for such he appeared to be-- drew aside a strip of matting, revealing a dark recess. Placing his finger upon his lips, he silently invited us to enter.

We did so, and the mat was dropped behind us. The sounds of crude music were now much plainer, and as Smith slipped a little shutter aside I gave a start of surprise.

Beyond lay a fairly large apartment, having divans or low seats around three of its walls. These divans were occupied by a motley company of Turks, Egyptians, Greeks, and others; and I noted two Chinese. Most of them smoked cigarettes, and some were drinking. A girl was performing a sinuous dance upon the square carpet occupying the center of the floor, accompanied by a young negro woman upon a guitar and by several members of the assembly who clapped their hands to the music or hummed a low, monotonous melody.

Shortly after our entrance into the passage the dance terminated, and the dancer fled through a curtained door at the farther end of the room. A buzz of conversation arose.

"It is a sort of combined Wekaleh and place of entertainment for a certain class of Oriental residents in, or visiting, London," Smith whispered. "The old gentleman who has just left us is the proprietor or host. I have been here before on several occasions, but have always drawn blank."

He was peering out eagerly into the strange clubroom.

"Whom do you expect to find here?" I asked.

"It is a recognized meeting-place," said Smith in my ear. "It is almost a certainty that some of the Fu-Manchu group use it at times."

Curiously I surveyed all these faces which were visible from the spy-hole. My eyes rested particularly upon the two Chinamen.

"Do you recognize anyone?" I whispered.

"S-sh!"

Smith was craning his neck so as to command a sight of the doorway. He obstructed my view, and only by his tense attitude and some subtle wave of excitement which he communicated to me did I know that a new arrival was entering. The hum of conversation died away, and in the ensuing silence I heard the rustle of draperies. The newcomer was a woman, then. Fearful of making any noise I yet managed to get my eyes to the level of the shutter.

A woman in an elegant, flame-colored opera cloak was crossing the floor and coming in the direction of the spot where we were concealed. She wore a soft silk scarf about her head, a fold partly draped across her face. A momentary view I had of her--and wildly incongruous she looked in that place--and she had disappeared from sight, having approached someone invisible who sat upon the divan immediately beneath our point of vantage.

From the way in which the company gazed towards her, I divined that she was no habitue of the place, but that her presence there was as greatly surprising to those in the room as it was to me.

Whom could she be, this elegant lady who visited such a haunt-- who, it would seem, was so anxious to disguise her identity, but who was dressed for a society function rather than for a midnight expedition of so unusual a character?

I began a whispered question, but Smith tugged at my arm to silence me. His excitement was intense. Had his keener powers enabled him to recognize the unknown?

A faint but most peculiar perfume stole to my nostrils, a perfume which seemed to contain the very soul of Eastern mystery. Only one woman known to me used that perfume-- Karamaneh.

Then it was she!

At last my friend's vigilance had been rewarded. Eagerly I bent forward. Smith literally quivered in anticipation of a discovery. Again the strange perfume was wafted to our hiding-place; and, glancing neither to right nor left, I saw Karamaneh--for that it was she I no longer doubted-- recross the room and disappear.

"The man she spoke to," hissed Smith. "We must see him! We must have him!"

He pulled the mat aside and stepped out into the anteroom. It was empty. Down the passage he led, and we were almost come to the door of the big room when it was thrown open and a man came rapidly out, opened the street door before Smith could reach him, and was gone, slamming it fast.

I can swear that we were not four seconds behind him, but when we gained the street it was empty. Our quarry had disappeared as if by magic. A big car was just turning the corner towards Leicester Square.

"That is the girl," rapped Smith; "but where in Heaven's name is the man to whom she brought the message? I would give a hundred pounds to know what business is afoot. To think that we have had such an opportunity and have thrown it away!"

Angry and nonplused he stood at the corner, looking in the direction of the crowded thoroughfare into which the car had been driven, tugging at the lobe of his ear, as was his habit in such moments of perplexity, and sharply clicking his teeth together. I, too, was very thoughtful. Claws were few enough in those days of our war with that giant antagonist. The mere thought that our trifling error of judgment tonight in tarrying a moment too long might mean the victory of Fu-Manchu, might mean the turning of the balance which a wise providence had adjusted between the white and yellow races, was appalling.

To Smith and me, who knew something of the secret influences at work to overthrow the Indian Empire, to place, it might be, the whole of Europe and America beneath an Eastern rule, it seemed that a great yellow hand was stretched out over London. Doctor Fu-Manchu was a menace to the civilized world. Yet his very existence remained unsuspected by the millions whose fate he sought to command.

"Into what dark scheme have we had a glimpse?" said Smith. "What State secret is to be filched? What faithful servant of the British Raj to be spirited away? Upon whom now has Fu-Manchu set his death seal?"

"Karamaneh on this occasion may not have been acting as an emissary of the Doctor's."

"I feel assured that she was, Petrie. Of the many whom this yellow cloud may at any moment envelop, to which one did her message refer? The man's instructions were urgent. Witness his hasty departure. Curse it!" He dashed his right clenched fist into the palm of his left hand. "I never had a glimpse of his face, first to last. To think of the hours I have spent in that

place, in anticipation of just such a meeting--only to bungle the opportunity when it arose!" Scarce heeding what course we followed, we had come now to Piccadilly Circus, and had walked out into the heart of the night's traffic. I just dragged Smith aside in time to save him from the off-front wheel of a big Mercedes. Then the traffic was blocked, and we found ourselves dangerously penned in amidst the press of vehicles.

Somehow we extricated ourselves, jeered at by taxi-drivers, who naturally took us for two simple Oriental visitors, and just before that impassable barrier the arm of a London policeman was lowered and the stream moved on a faint breath of perfume became perceptible to me.

The cabs and cars about us were actually beginning to move again, and there was nothing for it but a hasty retreat to the curb. I could not pause to glance behind, but instinctively I knew that someone--someone who used that rare, fragrant essence--was leaning from the window of the car.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND!" floated a soft whisper.

We gained the pavement as the pent-up traffic roared upon its way.

Smith had not noticed the perfume worn by the unseen occupant of the car, had not detected the whispered words. But I had no reason to doubt my senses, and I knew beyond question that Fu-Manchu's lovely slave, Karamaneh, had been within a yard of us, had recognized us, and had uttered those words for our guidance.

On regaining my rooms, we devoted a whole hour to considering what "ANDAMAN--SECOND" could possibly mean.

"Hang it all!" cried Smith, "it might mean anything-- the result of a race, for instance."

He burst into one of his rare laughs, and began to stuff broadcut mixture into his briar. I could see that he had no intention of turning in.

"I can think of no one--no one of note--in London at present upon whom it is likely that Fu-Manchu would make an attempt," he said, "except ourselves."

We began methodically to go through the long list of names which we had compiled and to review our elaborate notes. When, at last, I turned in, the night had given place to a new day. But sleep evaded me, and "ANDAMAN--SECOND" danced like a mocking phantom through my brain.

Then I heard the telephone bell. I heard Smith speaking.

A minute afterwards he was in my room, his face very grim.

"I knew as well as if I'd seen it with my own eyes that some black business was afoot last night," he said. "And it was. Within pistol-shot of us! Someone has got at Frank Norris West. Inspector Weymouth has just been on the 'phone."

"Norris West!" I cried, "the American aviator--and inventor--" "Of the West aero-torpedo--yes. He's been offering it to the English War Office, and they have delayed too long."

I got out of bed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the potentialities have attracted the attention of Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

Those words operated electrically. I do not know how long I was in dressing, how long a time elapsed ere the cab for which Smith had 'phoned arrived, how many precious minutes were lost upon the journey; but, in a nervous whirl, these things slipped into the past, like the telegraph poles seen from the window of an express, and, still in that tense state, we came upon the scene of this newest outrage.

Mr. Norris West, whose lean, stoic face had latterly figured so often in the daily press, lay upon the floor in the little entrance hall of his chambers, flat upon his back, with the telephone receiver in his hand.

The outer door had been forced by the police. They had had to remove a piece of the paneling to get at the bolt. A medical man was leaning over the recumbent figure in the striped pajama suit, and Detective-Inspector Weymouth stood watching him as Smith and I entered.

"He has been heavily drugged," said the Doctor, sniffing at West's lips, "but I cannot say what drug has been used. It isn't chloroform or anything of that nature. He can safely be left to sleep it off, I think."

I agreed, after a brief examination.

"It's most extraordinary," said Weymouth. "He rang up the Yard about an hour ago and said his chambers had been invaded by Chinamen. Then the man at the 'phone plainly heard him fall. When we got here his front door was bolted, as you've seen, and the windows are three floors up. Nothing is disturbed."

"The plans of the aero-torpedo?" rapped Smith.

"I take it they are in the safe in his bedroom," replied the detective, "and that is locked all right. I think he must have taken an overdose of something and had illusions. But in case there was anything in what he mumbled (you could hardly understand him) I thought it as well to send for you."

"Quite right," said Smith rapidly. His eyes shone like steel. "Lay him on the bed, Inspector."

It was done, and my friend walked into the bedroom.

Save that the bed was disordered, showing that West had been sleeping in it, there were no evidences of the extraordinary invasion mentioned by the drugged man. It was a small room--the chambers were of that kind which are let furnished--and very neat. A safe with a combination lock stood in a corner. The window was open about a foot at the top. Smith tried the safe and found it fast. He stood for a moment clicking his teeth together, by which I knew him to be perplexed. He walked over to the window and threw it up. We both looked out.

"You see," came Weymouth's voice, "it is altogether too far from the court below for our cunning Chinese friends to have fixed a ladder with one of their bamboo rod arrangements. And, even if they could get up there, it's too far down from the roof--two more stories-- for them to have fixed it from there."

Smith nodded thoughtfully, at the same time trying the strength of an iron bar which ran from side to side of the window-sill. Suddenly he stooped, with a sharp exclamation. Bending over his shoulder I saw what it was that had attracted his attention.

Clearly imprinted upon the dust-coated gray stone of the sill was a confused series of marks--tracks call them what you will.

Smith straightened himself and turned a wondering look upon me.

"What is it, Petrie?" he said amazedly. "Some kind of bird has been here, and recently." Inspector Weymouth in turn examined the marks.

"I never saw bird tracks like these, Mr. Smith," he muttered.

Smith was tugging at the lobe of his ear.

"No," he returned reflectively; "come to think of it, neither did I."

He twisted around, looking at the man on the bed.

"Do you think it was all an illusion?" asked the detective.

"What about those marks on the window-sill?" jerked Smith.

He began restlessly pacing about the room, sometimes stopping before the locked safe and frequently glancing at Norris West.

Suddenly he walked out and briefly examined the other apartments, only to return again to the bedroom.

"Petrie," he said, "we are losing valuable time. West must be aroused."

Inspector Weymouth stared.

Smith turned to me impatiently. The doctor summoned by the police had gone. "Is there no means of arousing him, Petrie?" he said.

"Doubtless," I replied, "he could be revived if one but knew what drug he had taken."

My friend began his restless pacing again, and suddenly pounced upon a little phial of tablets which had been hidden behind some books on a shelf near the bed. He uttered a triumphant exclamation.

"See what we have here, Petrie!" he directed, handing the phial to me. "It bears no label." I crushed one of the tablets in my palm and applied my tongue to the powder.

"Some preparation of chloral hydrate," I pronounced.

"A sleeping draught?" suggested Smith eagerly.

"We might try," I said, and scribbled a formula upon a leaf of my notebook. I asked Weymouth to send the man who accompanied him to call up the nearest chemist and procure the antidote.

During the man's absence Smith stood contemplating the unconscious inventor, a peculiar expression upon his bronzed face.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND," he muttered. "Shall we find the key to the riddle here, I wonder?"

Inspector Weymouth, who had concluded, I think, that the mysterious telephone call was due to mental aberration on the part of Norris West, was gnawing at his mustache impatiently when his assistant returned. I administered the powerful restorative, and although, as later transpired, chloral was not responsible for West's condition, the antidote operated successfully.

Norris West struggled into a sitting position, and looked about him with haggard eyes.

"The Chinamen! The Chinamen!" he muttered.

He sprang to his feet, glaring wildly at Smith and me, reeled, and almost fell.

"It is all right," I said, supporting him. "I'm a doctor. You have been unwell."

"Have the police come?" he burst out. "The safe--try the safe!"

"It's all right," said Inspector Weymouth. "The safe is locked--unless someone else knows the combination, there's nothing to worry about."

"No one else knows it," said West, and staggered unsteadily to the safe. Clearly his mind was in a dazed condition, but, setting his jaw with a curious expression of grim determination, he collected his thoughts and opened the safe.

He bent down, looking in.

In some way the knowledge came to me that the curtain was about to rise on a new and surprising act in the Fu-Manchu drama.

"God!" he whispered--we could scarcely hear him--"the plans are gone!"