

Re-enter Dr. Fu Manchu

by Sax Rohmer

Chapter 1

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

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

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

“I’m certainly surprised.”

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

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

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

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

“Meaning unmarried?”

“Meaning unmarried and not engaged to marry.”

“All clear,” Brian grinned.

“And you are prepared to travel?”

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

"Which, I am told, is a very good business."

Brian experienced a return of that sense of resentment with which Peter Wellingham filled him. These F.B.I. methods offended him. He became more than ever certain that he had been subjected to close scrutiny whilst he had waited.

But, to be fair, what did this mean? Only that these people were looking for a man of exceptional qualities for what must be a highly important job.

"It's a good business all right," he admitted.

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

"Sir John is here, Mr. Wellingham. He is on his way to the House and is pressed for time."

Peter Wellingham stood up, smiled apologetically.

"I won't detain you many minutes, Mr. Merrick. My legal adviser is also a member of Parliament. Please excuse me." He crossed to the door; switched on indirect lighting, so that the crowded bookcase became illuminated. "You might like to look over my library."

He went out and closed the door.

Peter Wellingham was a slender man of uncertain age; pale, with scanty fair hair. He was faultlessly groomed and wore correct morning dress. His white hands were slender, and of effeminate beauty. His voice and speech were those of the cultured Englishman, and he wore the short, close-trimmed moustache which Brian associated with the British army.

But, somehow, he couldn't imagine Peter Wellingham as a soldier, and, try as he would, he couldn't like him. . . .

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

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

Why? And from where?

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

But it was all too fantastic, although at one time his doubts had

prompted him to decline the job if it were offered. Indications suggested it might involve exciting travel, and this prospect thrilled him. He crossed to a bookcase, and began to read some of the titles. Many dealt with the tangle in the Near East, and not all were in English.

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

"It was Sir Denis's intention," Wellingham explained, "that this should be a six-month agreement. Renewable by mutual consent. This, I think would suit your plans?"

"Perfectly."

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

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

He signed the three copies without hesitation; passed them across the desk. Peter Wellingham signed in turn and rang for his secretary who acted as witness. "Draw Mr. Brian Merrick's cheque," he directed.

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

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

With the closing of the door the apparition had vanished, and Brian tried to tell himself that he was the victim of an illusion. Some shiny

object, such as a jade vase, probably stood in the cupboard. His slumbering distrust of Wellingham most not be allowed to upset his judgement. He knew Nayland Smith to be a high-up in the British Secret Service and a former Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard. Brian had longed to travel before settling down to serious work, but funds were short. Here was a golden opportunity!

Peter Wellingham looked up.

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

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

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

The slender white fingers were very cold. . .

* * *

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

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

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

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

Peter Wellingham’s white forehead was damp. He had detected a note

of menace in that strange voice.

“I should have been sorry, Doctor——”

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

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

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

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

The brilliant eyes were raised in a penetrating glance.

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

* * *

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

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

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

“Have I kept you waiting?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

He nodded. "Waiter, can I have a wine list?"

As the man went away:

"Is it something really good?" Lola asked. "I mean, worth a bottle of champagne?"

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

"I can be, Brian—if you're not being extravagant."

"Next, I have to leave London at short notice. And I hate that part of it now I've met you."

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

"I'm going to Cairo."

"Cairo? No, we haven't opened in Cairo so far. What kind of a job is this, Brian? Commercial or political?"

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

"I won't let you be extravagant," she told him, "and if I'm to eat any lunch it will have to be only a half bottle. Say, a half of Piper Heidsieck, '49."

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

"Lola, you're out of this world!" he declared. "By long odds you're the best-dressed and the prettiest girl in the lounge. You know all the answers, yet you're as sweet to me as if I meant something."

"Don't turn around!" Lola whispered. "But there's a queer-looking man sitting just behind us who seems to be interested in our conversation. This job of yours sounds rather hush-hush. Let's talk about Michel and frocks and me until we go in to lunch. Then you can tell me all about it. . . ."

Brian had reserved a cosy corner table in the grill-room, and when they were seated:

"Any sign of the spy?" he asked.

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

"I'm glad of it. There certainly seems to be something unusual about my new job. But as you put it in my way, Lola, you're entitled to know all about it. You had gone out when I got my mail this morning, and there was a very formal note which said something like 'The Honourable Peter Wellingham would be obliged if Mr. Brian Merrick would call at the above address at 11 a.m. in connection with his application dated the 15th instant.' You know all about that kind of people, Lola. Who is Peter Wellingham?"

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

“He’s Lord Chevradale’s son.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

In an old Cairo house not far from the Mosque of El-Ashraf, a house still untouched by Western “improvements”, a tall, gaunt figure paced slowly up and down a room which once had been the saloon of the *barem*.

High, and lighted by a lantern in the painted roof, it was brightly paved in the Arab manner, had elaborate panelled walls and two

musbrabiyeh windows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Thank you,” Gorodin muttered sarcastically.

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

“I remember.”

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

Gorodin bowed his head.

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

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

Dr. Fu Manchu reached along the table and struck a small silver gong which stood there. Matsukata, silently as an apparition, appeared in the archway, followed by two stocky Asiatics. Gorodin sprang up, fists clenched, but was instantly seized by the experienced man-handlers of the Chinese doctor’s bodyguard. And when Fu Manchu, watching without expression, spoke again, his voice came as a sibilant whisper.

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

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

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

Dr. Fu Manchu was charging a hypodermic syringe from the phial.

“This one injection will arrest both mental and physical decline, and give you ten more years at your present robust age to pursue your researches for the Ministry.”

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

“Hold his arm still, Matsukata.” Fu Manchu spoke softly, holding the

syringe in a steady hand. "Were you attached to my staff merely to watch me—or to destroy me? Answer."

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

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

"You mean *Doctor* Gorodin, that you fear to have your useful life extended for ten years beyond its normal span?"

The needle point touched Gorodin's skin.

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

"There beside you."

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

"There beside you."

"Then you must welcome these ten additional years of life."

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

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

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

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

Gorodin's lips were turning blue. "There is none."

"Then you will have the honour to die as you planned *I* should die. Recently I watched a rat in its last agonies from this treatment. I have no desire to watch another rat die in the same way." He dropped the syringe

in a glass bowl and glanced at Matsukata. "Sterilize. Incinerate the body."
Dr. Fu Manchu turned and walked slowly out of the laboratory. . . .

* * *

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

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

They lunched, dined and danced together. The sun shone and Brian was ridiculously happy. One afternoon sitting in Hyde Park with Lola he said: "Today I felt as though we were shopping for a honeymoon abroad! Oh, Lola! If only it had been true!"

He saw her flush, lower her lashes and glance away, then:

"We come from a country of hasty marriages," she told him, softly, her usual composure restored. "Such a marriage, as often as not, is just the first of several more. We enjoy being together. Why get serious about it?"

"Lola, I hate leaving you."

"I know I shall miss you, too, Brian. But we both have jobs to do and our jobs are interesting. All you know about me is what I've told you. But you find me good company and physically attractive. The same applies to you."

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

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

"Sure! I hadn't thought of that! But this is what I'll do. Directly I reach Cairo I'll radio my address to you at Michel's in London."

"No, Brian dear! Don't do that. Michel won't deal with private correspondence. And I might be anywhere. I'll tell you what, Brian. When I get my sailing orders I'll leave a forwarding address at the hotel if I haven't heard from you by then."

"It might take weeks to reach you!"

"I'll tip the hall porter to send it airmail. . . ."

That night they were out together later than usual, Lola lovely to look

upon in her cunningly simple dance dress, Brian drunk with longing but kept in check by those sudden moods of aloofness which sometimes came over Lola, like a mysterious cloak, changing her entire personality. At one moment all sweet surrender, in the next she became the unattainable woman.

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

She returned his kiss, which set him on fire, but gently pushed him away.

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

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

* * *

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

The lofty saloon was dimly lighted by hanging lamps of perforated brass. On a cushioned seat in one of the *mushrabiye* windows Dr. Fu Manchu lay, so that what little breeze there was could reach him from the courtyard outside.

His normally gaunt features were so grey and sunken that now they resembled a death's head. His eyes were dim. It seemed to Matsukata, the Japanese physician who sat watching him, that only the man's unquenchable spirit remained alive. When he spoke, the once imperious voice was a mere croak.

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

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

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

He became silent. Matsukata bent over him in sudden anxiety. A door

opened in the other end of the saloon and a man entered quietly, an old, white-bearded man who wore Arab dress. A change crept over Fu Manchu's grey face. Without opening his eyes:

"You have it, *Hakim*?" he whispered, speaking in Arabic.

"I have it, Excellency, at last."

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

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

"Positive."

"Pro . . . ceed . . . quickly . . ."

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

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

* * *

Brian had a restless night, not falling asleep until dawn was peering in at the window. He was wakened by the buzzing of his bedside phone. As he took up the receiver, he noted vaguely that it was ten o'clock.

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

A hope that the caller was Lola died. "Brian Merrick here."

"Hold the line for Mr. Wellingham."

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

"Good morning, Merrick. Hope I haven't wakened you up.

Your instructions are just to hand, in the form of a reservation for a BOAC flight to Cairo, leaving at the uncomfortable hour of 5.30 a.m. tomorrow morning. You'll be picked up at your hotel at 4, so I thought I'd give you time to pack!"

"Very thoughtful," Brian murmured.

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

"Everything."

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

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

He had sent a long airmail letter to his father, telling him that a chance to travel had come his way in the form of a job as assistant to no one less than Sir Denis Nayland Smith. The senator had replied, offering good advice and assuring Brian of his support if ever it should be needed. Then had followed some disturbing facts about the situation in the Near East.

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

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

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

He snatched up the phone; asked to be put through to her room.

There was no reply. But she had probably slept late as he had done, and was now in her bath. He hung up, waited impatiently for ten minutes, and then called again.

No reply.

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

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

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

He tore it open impatiently and read:

Brian dear: I found instructions when I got in last night to take a 9.35 a.m. train to Nottingham where there’s a sale of old lace. Which means I can’t get back until tomorrow! This drove me crazy. But I called the office this morning and asked for tomorrow off. I had to leave at 8.30 and didn’t like to wake you. But we can spend the whole day together.

Love, Brian dear. Lola.

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

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

head. Even his wonderful composure had almost deserted him. But:

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

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

The great change came slowly. First, the grey tinge faded from the face of the apparently dead man. Then, hollow cheeks seemed to fill out. Faintly, and soon more clearly, Fu Manchu’s breath became audible. The two doctors exchanged glances. The old Arab drew a handkerchief from the sleeve of his robe and dried his forehead.

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

He tried to tune in to this voice; to blot out other sounds:

oars in rowlocks, shouts of young oarsmen, splashing; to pick out words. And, up to a point, he succeeded.

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

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

His curiosity was satisfied.

The Honourable Peter Wellingham sat in the shade of a fine old oak tree talking animatedly to a girl whose face was shadowed by a large wide-brimmed hat but who almost certainly was Lola!

Brian turned his head quickly. He had a sudden sensation almost of nausea. Desperately he clung to the fact that he couldn't be sure the girl was Lola; but . . . Although Wellingham had called him on several occasions this was the first time he had seen him since that fateful morning when the agreement had been signed. And Wellingham had told him only a few hours ago that he was leaving for Paris almost immediately!

His world was turning topsy-turvy. Wellingham had lied to him—unless he had missed his plane—and, unless he had made a stupid mistake, Lola was not in Nottingham!

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

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

They were walking away!

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

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

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

Brian called Peter Wellingham's number, but was told by a soothing female voice which he seemed to recognize as that of the Eurasian secretary, that Mr. Wellingham was not at home. He gave his name and asked where Mr. Wellingham had gone. She was so sorry, but she didn't

know. Was there any message?

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His apartment had a balcony overlooking a busy street and the Esbekiyeh Gardens. The ruins of Shepheard's Hotel, near by, which the driver pointed out, struck a warning note, recalling his father's advice, but it wasn't sufficient to depress him. Whilst he was having a shower and brush-up, a boy brought him a message. It was neatly typed on paper headed with an address in Sharia Abdin and a phone number. It said:

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

Yours obediently, A.J. Ahmad.

This suited Brian well enough. He was certainly tired, and beyond perhaps a stroll in the surrounding streets he had no wish to go sightseeing. He planned to hit the hay soon after dinner; which programme he carried out and turned in by ten o'clock. ...

He was at breakfast when Mr. Ahmad arrived.

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

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

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

Mr. Ahmad shrugged slightly. "Of course as soon as possible."

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

"Most certainly not. You know him. Judge for yourself.

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

“Take a dragoman? Now listen, Mr Ahmad: Is that an order from Sir Denis?”

“But certainly not! It is merely a suggestion.”

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

Mr Ahmad smiled a dazzling smile.

“The true sentiments of your freedom-loving country! Please yourself.”

“Thank you.”

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

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

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

Sauntering across the Esbekiyeh, he was deeply interested in all he saw, and went on into a street bisected by a maze of narrower streets, all teeming with noisy humanity. He was in the Muski, artery of many bazaars. Beggars, sellers of bead necklaces, scarabs and what-not buzzed around him like flies around a honey-pot. But he smilingly ignored them, which the head hall-porter had told him was the best method. From passers-by who wore European dress and therefore might speak English, he inquired the way to the Khan Khalil where (the same authority had informed him) swords, daggers, silk robes, amber mouthpieces and other colourful native products were on view.

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

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

Achmed reached behind him, opened a drawer and produced a flat tin

box containing a hundred. Smilingly he began to explain that only from him could these cigarettes be obtained. But Achmed had lost his customer's attention. Farther back in the shadows of the shop a female figure was vaguely visible to Brian—a girl who held a veil around the lower part of her face. She appeared to be watching him. He glanced away again. Dimly understanding what Achmed had been saying:

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

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

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

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

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

He had caught a glimpse of lustrous amber eyes!

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

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

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

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

Just as he was clear of the mosque, out from its courtyard spurted a party of Egyptian police. He noticed an open doorway almost beside him, darted in and found it led to nowhere but a rickety staircase. Outside, came a clash. Wild shouting—fighting. Then a shot.

Brian started upstairs, as the tumult suggested that the police were being pushed back. On the first dark landing he nearly knocked over a

water jar which stood near the stairhead. But the house seemed to be inhabited only by a variety of stench. He mounted higher. The battle, now, was raging immediately outside the door below. Went up another flight—and found himself on the flat roof!

He saw all sorts of pans, jars and indescribable litter lying about, but nobody was up there. Brian crouched and looked over the low parapet down into the street.

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

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

A heavy iron gate in a high wall which he remembered having noticed as he ran into the doorway below opened on the tree-shaded courtyard of a fine old Arab house. *Mushrabiyeh* windows overhung the courtyard on one side, but directly facing Brian were two large barred windows. Evidently there must be another which he couldn't see; for the room was well lighted.

And in this room, pacing restlessly about, he saw a tall, lean man who smoked a pipe, and who seemed to be talking angrily to someone else who wasn't visible from Brian's viewpoint.

For some time he lay there on the dirty roof, enthralled, unwilling to credit what he saw, but anxious to make sure that he wasn't suffering from a strange delusion. The shouts below had merged into sullen murmurs as the young rowdies were taken in charge by the police and marched off.

Brian scarcely noticed them, now. He was watching— watching.

And at last he was sure.

The man in the barred room was *Nayland Smithi*

* * *

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

"It was the disturbance made by the students from El-Azhar, Master. I

lost sight of him and could not get through.”

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

“Master, I——”

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

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

No one was at work there.

On a wooden pedestal was a life-sized head of a man modelled in clay—the most conspicuous object in the studio. A number of sketches and photographs of the same subject were pinned to the walls. It would appear that the sculptor had worked from these and not from the living model.

It was a fine, virile portrait of a masterful character; but Dr. Fu Manchu appeared to be particularly interested in the shape of the moulded nose. He surveyed it from every side, the all-seeing gaze of green eyes absorbed in the finer lines of the nostrils, the straight bridge. He compared the clay model with the photographs, and at last seemed to be satisfied.

He passed on. He went down a short stair and entered a fully-equipped surgery filled with a nauseating odour of anaesthetics.

A patient lay on an operating table, two surgeons bending over him. They sprang upright as Fu Manchu appeared. He ignored them, stooped, studied the face of the man who lay there, and then turned blazing eyes upon the surgeons, one of whom was Matsukata.

“Who operated?” he demanded.

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

“I operated, Master.” He spoke in French and used the word *mattre*.

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

“I assure you——”

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

Chapter 4

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

More by luck than good navigation he presently found himself once more in the street leading to the Khan Khalil. He looked around for a stray cab, for he was wildly impatient to solve the mystery of Sir Denis's presence in Cairo, and in a house in the heart of the native quarter. What in the name of sanity did it mean?

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

No—he had made no mistake, Sir Denis was in that strange old house hidden in the heart of the Oriental city.

Why?

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

The uniformed Egyptian smiled.

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

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

"There are many!"

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

"The Ghuriyeh! But I understand, sir."

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

"I know what you have seen, sir. It is the house of the Sherif

Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf.”

“And who is he?”

“A very holy man, sir. A descendant of the Prophet—and the greatest physician in Cairo. . . .”

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

How it happened he could never quite make out. He had heard no sound, had no idea anybody was there. But a girl wearing a strapless gown which displayed her creamy arms and shoulders had apparently been standing just behind him.

She raised her hand too late. He had spilled most of the whisky (and some of the ice) all over her!

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

“Quick! A napkin or something!”

A napkin was produced. The girl took it from his hand, looking aside, and began to try to dry her frock and her bare shoulders.

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

She glanced at him. “You are right about my dress.” She had a quaint, fascinating accent. “But truly I think I was to blame. I was looking for someone, and how could you know I was right behind you.”

“I *should* have known! I shall never forgive myself, but say that *you* forgive me. You must let me drive you to wherever you live, so that you can change.” He detected the dawning of a smile stealing across her face. “Then, as I guess you have a dinner date, just allow me to see you

tomorrow and fix up everything for a new dress.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Then you’ll dine with me?”

“Yes—if you really want it so.”

When she had gone, Brian had his glass refilled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

late this afternoon.”

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

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

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

“You saw . . . him . . . in Cairo . . .”

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

Brian wondered if he had left it too late. He could try.

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

Mr. Ahmad moistened his lips with his tongue.

“Where was this?”

“I asked the driver as it happens, and he told me we had just passed the British Consulate.”

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

He left soon afterwards, a man badly confused; and Brian settled down to try to puzzle out the truth. Mr. Ahmad had behaved like a crook unmasked, but on the other hand there could be a different explanation.

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

* * *

Dr. Fu Manchu was writing at a large desk of Arab manufacture, most cunningly inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl and semi-precious stones. It was loaded with books, racks of test tubes, manuscripts and certain queer objects not easy to define. Peko, the tiny marmoset, a companion of Fu

Manchu's travels, crouched on the doctor's shoulder, beady eyes moving from point to point restlessly.

There was a faint buzzing. A voice spoke.

"Abdul Ahmad is here."

"I will see him."

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

"Yes? You wish to report something?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

He was entangled in an invisible web! Every move he made was

covered. Someone who had known he was going to Achmed's shop had planted the girl there. She was infernally clever, too. That trick in the cocktail bar had been done beautifully!

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

What did it all mean?

Why had no word come from Sir Denis? And why was he hiding in that old house in the native quarter?

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

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

Brian clapped his hands for a waiter and gave the necessary orders.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What's the rest of his name?"

"Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

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

"What so much surprise you, Brian?" And even now the way she said "Brian" fascinated him. But he knew he must step warily.

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

Zoe smiled delightedly.

"That is wonderful! And you don't know he is here?"

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

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

Could he possibly have been wrong all along? Prejudiced by his dislike for Peter Wellingham, he might have jumped to the conclusion that the girl he had seen with him in Hyde Park was Lola—for he had never actually caught even a glimpse of her face. Still hag-ridden by his

suspicious, he might also have assumed, wrongly, that Zoe and the veiled lady of the bazaar were identical, for no better reason than that both had amber eyes! Amber eyes were not uncommon in the East.

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

He was a man who once his suspicion had been aroused could never let the matter rest, but must leave no stone unturned to prove or disprove his doubts. If indeed he had become involved in a conspiracy against Nayland Smith, a conspiracy in which Wellingham, Lola, Ahmed, and Zoe were concerned, a love affair with Zoe was the best, and by far the most pleasant, way to find it out. So he argued.

And he had wasted no time.

Zoe, who, for all her youth, he suspected to be far from unsophisticated in love and the ways of lovers, had responded to the point of unconditional surrender. And it was then that Brian began to distrust himself. Never once, even while he caressed her, mingling kisses with what he believed to be artful leading questions, had she breathed one word that he wanted to hear. He had been equally reticent.

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

And Brian remembered that Nayland Smith had spoken of this very expedition when he had visited their home in Washington!

Brian, being no roue, began to reproach himself. If Zoe was really not a conspirator sent to trap him, he was behaving rather like a cad. He must

not pretend to himself that the zeal of the investigator and not the fact that Zoe was very desirable inspired his love-making. It wouldn't be true. If he had known, beyond all doubt, that she was a spy of the enemy he might have scrapped his scruples. But he didn't know.

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

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

This prospect of even a little action cheered him while he took his bath; and going down to the dining-room he made a good, if late, breakfast.

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

But Mr. Ahmad's was not one of them.

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

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

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

The smile was wiped out. Dark eyes challenged him.

"I'm sorry. There's no one of that name here." It was final; a plain rebuff.

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

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

"I'll try." He turned to go; when the girl said, more softly:

"Try the Aziza Cigarette Corporation, third floor. They have been here longer than we have. They may know. But don't say I sent you."

Brian swung around, and met the brilliant smile again.

"Thanks a million!" He gave her a happy grin.

He was really getting somewhere. The cigarettes he had bought from old Achmed es-Salah were called "Aziza"! This was becoming exciting. But it revived all his half-discarded doubts. If, as he had at some time

suspected, it was Zoe he had seen in Achmed's shop and Zoe who had followed him when he left, than Achmed was back in the picture. And if Mr. Ahmad belonged to the Aziza Cigarette Coproration, then the chain was complete. And he had good reason to believe that he did.

The reason was this: The girl in the Loofah office (who evidently disliked Mr. Ahmad) had warned him: "Don't say I sent you... ."

Chapter 5

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

"Can I see Mr. Ahmad?" he inquired.

The young Egyptian looked blank. "Nobody here."

"Are you expecting Mr Ahmad?"

"Don't know him, sir. Don't know any of the gentlemen."

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

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

He looked proud of having given so much information. His mouth expanded in a huge grin which seemed to split his face in half and also to increase his squint.

"Who's Mr. Quintero?"

"The landlord, sir."

"Is he in the building?"

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

Brian turned abruptly and walked out. This game of blind man's buff was beginning to get on his nerves. He couldn't very well call at every office in the building and inquire for Mr. Ahmad; and the unbroken silence of that gentleman's phone made it difficult to get in touch.

When he came out on to the street he nearly fell over the dirty person of an old beggar seated on the ground right beside the doorway. This ragged object stood up. "*Bakshish*," he whined, his hand stretched out.

Brian walked across to the waiting *arabtyeh*.

"Do you know the house of the Sherif Mohammed Ibn el-Ashraf?" he asked the driver.

The man looked startled. "Yes, sir. But this house not open to visitors."
"Never mind. I want to go there."

Brian turned to open the door. But the old mendicant had it open already. "*Bakshish*, my gentleman."

Again the eager hand was extended, and Brian threw him a coin as the cab was driven away, and thought no more of the incident.

And so before long he found himself once more in the odorous, noisy, narrow streets of the Oriental city. Here were the hawkers of fruit, vegetables, lemon water and what not, intoning their timeworn cries, descendants of those who had hawked the same wares and cried the same calls when Harun al Raschid ruled Egypt from Baghdad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The man unlocked the gate and stood aside for Brian to go in. Then he locked it again. And Brian experienced a pang of apprehension, almost a physical chill, when he recognized the fact that he was fastened into this mystery house. He turned and called to the driver: "Wait for me!"

"Will you come this way, please."

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

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

He walked out, closing the door behind him.

Brian began to examine the room more carefully. Glancing behind him, he saw a window fitted with bars. He crossed to it; looked out. Then he knew.

He was in the room in which he had seen Nayland Smith!

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

That sensation of physical chill stole over Brian again.

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

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

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

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

"I certainly did!"

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

Brian returned to the divan, and the Sherif (evidently known here as "The Seyyid") seated himself cross-legged on a large ottoman facing him. His unwavering regard Brian found very disconcerting.

"My name is Merrick——"

"So I am told, Mr Merrick."

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

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

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

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

"On the roof of a house right opposite."

"Indeed? It was fortunate that you, and no one else, observed him. But the ways of the All Knowing are inscrutable." He touched his brow, his lips and his breast in a gesture which reminded Brian of a Roman Catholic making the sign-of-the-cross. "Sir Denis is in great danger, Mr. Merrick; and his health is impaired. He sought sanctuary in my house, for he knows me well."

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

“I am sorry to hear this. Can I see him?”

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

“He does. I may count on that, sir?”

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

* * *

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

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

“It was well done, Mohammed.” He spoke softly, in English;

“and even better that we were prepared for such an emergency. Brian Merrick is an almost irreplaceable unit in my plan, but had you stumbled or faltered, I fear we should, nevertheless, have been forced to dispense with him. His life hung in the balance.”

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

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

The Sherif bowed. “The urgency is great, Excellency. Inquiries reached me only an hour ago from Moscow concerning the lack of a

report from Gorodin. If we lose Soviet confidence it might mean the abandonment of our plan.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“How do you mean?”

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

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

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

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

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

“And who’s never home!”

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

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

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

“Of course.”

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

Brian wasn’t sorry when Mr. Ahmad went. Whatever might be the

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

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

It was Zoe. "Oh, Brian! I am so sorry. My uncle from Luxor will be here this evening and I cannot see you! It is perhaps that I have to go back with him. I don't know."

"I hope you don't, Zoe. I doubt if I could find time to get up to Luxor, much as I'd like to. But as it happens I'm tied up this evening, too. I have to wait in for Sir Denis."

"So, he finds you! I know he will. You may give him my love, but don't tell him how much love I give you!"

Brian heard her musical laugh. "When shall I know if you're going to Luxor?"

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

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

A boy was shaking him by the shoulder. "Wanted on the phone, sir."

And when he got there and said, "Hullo!" a snappy voice replied, "Brian Merrick, Junior?"

"I am Brian Merrick."

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

* * *

After an early dinner, Brian went up to his room. A bottle of Scotch and a supply of soda water in an ice-bucket were there by his orders. And feeling oddly strung-up, excited, he sampled the whisky while waiting, constantly looking at his watch.

At last he was to learn the whole truth.

He would know tonight what he had committed himself to do; what his duties were to be. All the minor mysteries and misunderstandings would be cleared up. The grand mystery—the nature of the project in which Nayland Smith was engaged—would be unfolded.

It was such an adventure as he had often dreamed of. And even before this strange appointment with Nayland Smith it had brought events into his life more unusual than any he had known before. His meeting with Lola in London. Her drawing his notice to the advertisement in *The Times*. The strange interview with the Honourable Peter Wellingham and his appointment to what looked like a fabulous job.

-Then, the journey to Cairo. The silence of Lola. Zoe! That unforgettable interview with the Sherif Mohammed in the house in the Oriental city. And now—this strangest incident of all: “At eight o’clock—with the door ajar”!

What could be Sir Denis’s object? Unless he was in actual physical danger and feared an attack upon him somewhere in the corridor leading to this room. Brian could think of none. Of course he might be hoping to avoid observation altogether;

suspect that there were spies in the hotel. But how could he hope to escape detection in the lobby?

It was a puzzle. Brian looked again at his watch.

Three minutes to eight. . .

Excitement mounted second by second, now. He listened, intently, watching the slit of light from the corridor.

He heard the lift stop at his floor, the clang of the opening gate. Someone stepped out, walked briskly along towards his door . . . and passed it!

One minute to eight. . .

Another door was unlocked some distance away, and closed. That was the person who had just come up.

Silence.

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

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

A man came in—and closed the door.

It was Nayland Smith!

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

“Sir Denis! At last!”

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

Brian, utterly confused, obeyed the snappy order. Complete darkness

came, until it was dispersed by faint streaks of light as Nayland Smith moved the slats of a Venetian blind.

“What’s the idea?” Brian asked.

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

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

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

Brian grinned as he grasped the extended hand. This was the Nayland Smith he remembered, and yet, in some way, a changed Nayland Smith. His snappy, erratic style of speech, sometimes so disconcerting, remained the same as ever. The change was in his expression. He had the kind of tan which never wears off, but through it Brian seemed to see that he had become unhealthily pale. His features, too, were almost haggard, and he wore a thin strip of surgical plaster across the bridge of his nose.

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

“Right. Do I look it?”

“You look fit enough now, but I can see you’ve been through a tough time.”

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

Brian passed a drink; sat down facing him.

“I’m afraid I *don’t* see, Sir Denis! I have been walking in circles ever since I was selected for this job. I don’t know what I have to do. I don’t know what you’re up against. I’m honoured and delighted to be with you, whatever the game may be. But I do want very much to know what it is.”

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

“Naturally,” he snapped. “I’m here to tell you. First, you might like to know how I got in? Service entrance. Walked up the stairs.”

“Why?”

“*He* knows you’re here to join me, Merrick!”

“He? Who’s he?”

“Doctor Fu Manchu! You heard me talk to your father about him. He’s the biggest menace the Western world has ever had to cope with. He has

the brain of a genius and the soul of Satan! He's stronger today than ever he was. His agents are everywhere, in every corner of the world. This building is certainly covered. So are you. Either one of us might disappear tonight!"

"Good God!"

"It's a fact. Not until I have got in touch with the British authorities (who so far don't know I'm here) can I show myself in Cairo! After that, we'll both have official protection.

Abdul Ahmad is an old worker of mine. He's sworn to secrecy. So is the Seyyid Mohammed."

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

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

Nayland Smith shook his head. "East Berlin."

"Berlin! Then whatever brought you to Cairo?"

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

"Didn't England want him?"

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

Nayland Smith's pipe went out. He stopped to re-light it.

"Yes?" Brian spoke excitedly.

"There was only one passenger in the car... . But it was *Dr. Fu Manchu!*"

Chapter 6

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

"*Ssh!* Listen!"

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

"What?"

"Wait a moment. I may be wrong, but——"

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

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

The phone bell rang.

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

It was Zoe.

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

“Very glad indeed.”

“I will call you in the morning.”

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

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

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

Nayland Smith smiled. It wasn’t quite the boyish smile which Brian seemed to remember, but he had to allow for the fact that Sir Denis had obviously been through hell, although he treated his troubles lightly.

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

“I must come down with you, Sir Denis!”

“Not on your life! You’re the last man in Cairo I want to be seen with! Look—walk along to the lift, and when you get there, just open the door opposite—the one with a red light above it—and make sure there’s nobody on the stair it leads to. If all’s clear, pretend to press the bell for the lift, and don’t attempt to contact me. Enjoy Zoe’s company! She doesn’t know you’re working with me?”

“I never told her so.”

“Never do!” Good night!”

* * *

But when Nayland Smith had gone in his mysterious way, Brian sat

down to try to get these new developments into focus.

One thing was crystal clear. He had let himself in for a devil of a job! He was up to his ears in an international intrigue which obviously involved the safety of the United States—perhaps of the whole Western world. He thrilled to the prospect, but asked himself, in cold blood, if he felt competent to go through with it. Something more than mere physical courage was called for.

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

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

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

What could it be?

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

And now it appeared he had *carte blanche* to do as he pleased for the next few days.

Yet Nayland Smith had warned him that his every move was covered!

Brian took another drink.

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

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

He hoped she would call him when she got back, and be in time for a drink and a smoke before parting for the night. Brian had made few acquaintances since his arrival in Cairo, and none, except Zoe, whom he cared to cultivate. He settled down to write a report to his father of his first meeting here with Sir Denis Nayland Smith and his impressions of that remarkable man. . . .

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

Perhaps (as he thought afterwards) it was an aftermath of his concentration on the character and strange life of Sir Denis which had gone into the writing of the letter, but he had a singular and very disturbing dream. . . .

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

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

The vision faded. . . . Brian was in Zoe's arms. “Brian!” she whispered, trembling—“Brian, listen to me! Leave here at once. . . . I love you, but you must go. Promise me you will go!” But he couldn't utter a word. He was dumb with fright. . . . Then the harsh voice came again. “Do you dare to forget who is your master?” Some unseen force dragged Zoe away. “Brian!” he heard. “Brian! Answer me . . .”

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

“Don't do it, Merrick! Give me your word!”

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

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

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

“Brian! Brian! Are you there? Answer me. . . .”

It was Zoe!

He was unable to make a sound!

But still he could hear the banging—only it grew less and less audible. . . .

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

lamp! He was in bed!

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

His wristwatch recorded 3 a.m. His pyjama jacket was damp with cold perspiration. . . .

* * *

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

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

Whilst he drank his coffee and enjoyed the first cigarette (there was no news from London), he called Zoe. She was often out in the morning unless they had an early date, and he had never discovered where she went. But he knew that she rarely left before ten o'clock. She answered at once, and he thought her voice sounded rather listless.

"I believe you were out disgracefully late," he told her with mock severity. "Admit that I'm right."

He heard her laugh. "It is true, Brian. But it is not the gay time you think! There is so much family trouble to talk about. My poor Aunt Isobel, who is my father's sister, has been so ill. She cannot put up with me yet at Luxor, although she is getting better. I told you last night that I am to stay here awhile. Are you glad?"

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

"Quite very much okay, Brian! When shall I be ready?"

"Is eleven-thirty too early?"

"No. Downstairs at eleven-thirty."

And at eleven-thirty Zoe came down to the lounge wearing a cream dress which left her arms and shoulders bare. They were slightly sun-tanned to the hue of *café-au-lait*. A large sunhat shaded her face, and Brian decided that she looked even more lovely than usual.

The drive out to Gizah was all too short. He held her close in the near

privacy of the cab, and this morning, for some mysterious reason, Zoe thrilled him in a new way.

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

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

"Zoe," he began uneasily. "Something is bothering you. Tell me what it is. I must know."

Still she hesitated, glancing around as if she feared to be overheard. Brian reached across and took both her hands. "Tell me, Zoe. What is it?"

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

He had an uneasy moment. "You don't mean—you are to see me no more?"

She shook her head, helplessly. "It is not as you think, Brian. I want to see you always. It is that I have to ask you something which, even if it break my heart, for *your* sake I must ask."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Brian!"—a whisper—"Brian! Down there—I heard someone move!"

Brian sprang up; craned over the wall and looked down . . . Zoe was right.

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

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

A skinny, dirty hand was stretched out. “*Bakshish—bak-shish!*”

Brian caught his breath. He leaned farther over.

“Let me have a look at you!”

The old beggar looked up. One glance was enough.

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

* * *

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

Nayland Smith knew, for Nayland Smith had warned him. Long ago, returning from Washington to renew his Oxford studies, Brian had forgotten the discussion between his father and Sir Denis concerning (as he thought at the time) the possibly mythical creature called Dr. Fu Manchu. But now——

This fabulous Oriental genius had cast his net around him ... and Nayland Smith himself was fighting to escape from it!

What was he to make of Zoe’s warning?

Clearly, she knew of his danger. Perhaps she had learned it at that very moment when the dream had appeared to him. How she had come to know he couldn’t imagine. But she was evidently aware of the fact that in urging him to run for it she herself might become enmeshed.

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

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

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

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

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

"I don't believe he has a word of English."

"But I heard you say, 'Let me look at you!' Does he look?"

"He just knew I was mad at him and looked up. It doesn't mean he knows English."

Zoe's amber eyes blazed. "He was listening. You *know* he was listening!"

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

She turned her head aside, so that the brim of her hat quite shadowed her face.

"I cannot explain to you, Brian. What was told to me was told—in confidence. For your sake I speak. If it is found out——"

"Well, Zoe dear, what then?"

"It could be terrible. But you can do nothing about it. Only one thing, to give me peace of mind about you ... Do as I ask. Do not stay here one hour longer than you can help!"

"But, Zoe. I don't know, and I'm not going to worry you to tell me, where you got hold of the idea that I'm in danger, but isn't it possible you're letting yourself get all het up for nothing?"

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

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

"I guess you'd like to get back." He spoke uneasily. "I'll try to contact Sir Denis."

"It will be no use," Zoe whispered. "But—yes—let us go, Brian."

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

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

She reached up and held both his hands. "Not to Cairo, Brian—to Port Said where we can find a ship! Do this and I will come with you. Leave all you have. It will be better—for you and for me. I am not mad. I know what I say. Do it—do it, Brian!"

"But, Zoe, dear, tonight——"

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

His brain behaving like a carousel, Brian went into the hotel and

arranged for a car. He could no longer delude himself. The ragged old ruffian he had found seated in the road was a spy. And he was there to listen to their conversation. Zoe knew this, and her pitiable panic was clear enough evidence of the menace overhanging them.

He toyed longingly with the temptation to accept her warning. She had become more than ever desirable. She was beautiful, and a delightful companion, responding to all his moods, equally prepared to dance, to swim or to ride as the humour moved him. And in all they did together she was graceful and efficient.

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

He walked slowly back to the garden and along to their table.

But Zoe wasn't there!

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

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

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

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

"Your car is waiting, sir. . . ."

Chapter 7

Dr. Fu Manchu, seated on a divan in the saloon of the old house near the Mosque of El-Ashraf, gazed straight before him as a man in a trance. A sickly smell of opium hung in the still air. The long, hypnotic eyes were narrowed. Sometimes a sort of film seemed to pass across them and was gone, leaving them brilliantly green.

He aroused himself; struck a small gong which stood on a table beside him. And immediately, like a *djinn* answering a magic summons, a stocky Burmese with a caste-mark on his forehead, came in and saluted deeply. Fu Manchu spoke to him in his own language:

"Is Zobeida here?"

"She is here, Master."

"Send her in to me."

So soon after the man went out as to suggest that the girl had been waiting in some adjoining room, Zoe came in. She was dressed as she had

been dressed at Mena House, except that she no longer wore her sun-hat. Although pale, she was quite composed. It was the composure of resignation.

Without attempting to meet the glance which Fu Manchu fixed upon her, she dropped to her knees and lowered her head. There was a long silence in the saloon. Sounds from the street outside sometimes penetrated dimly, but no word was spoken, until:

“Look up,” Dr. Fu Manchu commanded harshly, now using Arabic. “Look up! Speak!”

Zoe, known here as Zobeida, looked up.

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

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

“I was sorry for him.”

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

“There is no room for these moods of compassion in those who work for the Si-Fan. I bought you in an Arabian slave-market. I bought you for your beauty. A beautiful woman is a valuable weapon. But the blade must be true. You were trained to take your place in any walk of society. You have all the necessary accomplishments. Neither time nor money was spared in perfecting you for my purpose. Yet, like another I trained and trusted, your Arab blood betrayed you—and betrayed me!”

Fu Manchu’s strange voice rose to a hissing falsetto on the last word. Zoe raised her hands to her face, and seemed to droop like a fading flower.

“Whispered words,” the remorseless voice went on, “a man’s caresses, and those years of patient training became wasted years in as many minutes. Yet, Zobeida, this was not by any means the first assignment you have carried out. You have passed through those fires unscathed—as you were taught to do. Tell me, Zobeida, are you afflicted by the delusion miscalled *love*?”

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

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

Dr. Fu Manchu considered her silently for a moment.

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

Zoe looked up. “I have not! He knows nothing of your plans, for even

had I wanted to, I could have told him nothing. He knows that I think he is in danger, that he should go away——”

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

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

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

* * *

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

He had exhausted every probability before leaving Mena House. There was no doubt that she had gone. . . . But no one had seen her go!

Frantically, he tried to think of possible sources of information. Apart from Nayland Smith, he knew none of her friends. In fact, as he realized now, he knew next to nothing about her except what she had told him. And Nayland Smith had impressed upon him, “Don’t attempt to contact me . . .”

Who was this uncle by marriage, possibly still in Cairo, with whom Zoe had discussed those family matters on the previous night? Where was he staying? What was his name?

He didn’t know!

Once, as his widely travelled father had told him, when the British controlled Egypt, the Cairo police had been a highly efficient force. But now, when neither Britons nor Americans were too popular, what hope had he of co-operation?

The mystery of the thing appalled him . . . Had Zoe been abducted?

Clearly enough, she had picked up information somewhere concerning the existence of Fu Manchu—information which had terrified her. It was folly to try to pretend to himself that the dirty old vagabond sitting on the road at Gizeh in hearing of their conversation was not a spy; that his previous appearance in Sharia Abdin had been a coincidence.

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

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

cigarettes; had several drinks. In desperation, he called Mr. Ahmad's number . . . No reply.

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

"Oh, Brian dear!"—*Zoe!*—"I cannot tell you how unhappy I am. My uncle finds out from the hotel porter where we are gone and comes out by car to Mena House to get me. There is not one moment to lose. My poor Aunt Isobel is dying. She asks for me. So we rush for the train. I am at the station now . . . The train just comes in! I must run." The sound of a kiss.

"Good-bye, Brian . . ."

"But, Zoe——"

She had gone . . .

* * *

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

"You are not feeling so well, Mr. Merrick?"

"Thank you. I feel fine."

"You looked, or so I thought, unhappy. Yes?"

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

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

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

"They haven't! It's not a question of money."

"Then of what?"

"Of self-respect, I guess! I find out I have a spy on my trail. I should like to report it. There's no one to report to! I'm supposed to be in on this thing. But I'm left sitting right outside."

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

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

But he didn't want to talk to Ahmad about Zoe, and:

"Could you deliver a message from me to Sir Denis?" he asked.

"But certainly. With pleasure."

But Mr. Ahmad spoke in a curiously uneasy way.

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

Mr. Ahmad now looked unmistakably embarrassed. Brian could see that he was trying hard to think up an answer to that one. But at last:

"I can only obey Sir Denis's orders, Mr. Merrick," he explained. "Surely you know that he thinks it important, until his plans are complete, that no connection between you should be suspected?"

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

Mr. Ahmad leaned forward, his expression very earnest.

"Has Sir Denis told you where he is?"

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

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

Brian thought a while, and then, "No," he agreed. "I guess not. But if I step in to a desk for a minute and write a note, can you undertake that he'll get it?"

He stumped out the butt of his cigarette in an ash-tray.

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

"Thanks."

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

He sighed, looked once more at the name on the cigarette, and then went on smoking. He began to write. Above all things he mustn't let his imagination run away with him again. . . .

When he came back to the terrace and handed the note to Mr. Ahmad: "I shall see that this is placed in Sir Denis's hands not later than noon," Ahmad promised.

"Fine. Now, what about a drink?"

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

"Start for where?" Brian wanted to know.

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

"I see. Well, I'm ready at short notice."

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

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

"Here, Sir Denis!"

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

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

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

"But what's his phone number?"

"That's the snag, Merrick. Doubt if he has one. Runs a sort of art shop near the Palace Hotel, Never knew the address. Does reproductions of murals from the old temples, statuettes of gods and so on. Sir Lionel Barton employed him when he was excavating a tomb up there."

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

"It might, Merrick—in time. I can suggest nothing better. Shall be sorry if anything happens to Isobel Jansen. I know Jansen was devoted to her. By the way, stand by tomorrow. I'm breaking cover. Look out for me!"

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

But, try how he would to fight it off, a mood of black depression swept

down upon him. . . .

Chapter 8

Dr. Fu Manchu sat behind his desk, his disconcerting eyes focused upon Mr. Ahmad.

“You have instructed our agent at Luxor?”

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

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

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

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

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

Fu Manchu suddenly stood up. His eyes blazed as though fires burned behind their greenness.

“What folly is this!” The words were rather hissed than spoken. “Are our Si-Fan directives no longer obeyed? My orders were clear: Accept whatever conditions, however harsh are imposed upon you. Lull the enemy into a state of false security. Wait! Wait for my word! Then—but not until then—strike, all my millions together. And at last China, our China, will lie like a choice pearl in my hand!”

Fu Manchu spoke as a man inspired—or possessed. The Sherif Mohammed lowered his head and muttered a Moslem prayer.

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

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

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

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

Fu Manchu nodded. “Let the messenger wait. The fate of all the world hangs now upon a silk thread. Communism is not ready for war, and has nothing to gain by it. Washington fails to see how one step in the wrong

direction may force the hazard. I have been selected to prevent this catastrophe, since I alone could hope to carry out the plan. Upon my success everything depends. Be good enough, my friend, to ask Dr. Matsukata to come in."

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

Matsukata came in; bowed ceremoniously. "Excellency wished to see me?"

Fu Manchu fixed his strange gaze upon the Japanese surgeon.

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

"I am ready."

"And your last patient?"

"Is ready also."

"You are satisfied?"

"He is sleeping. But Excellency might wish to see him."

Fu Manchu slightly shook his head. "It is unnecessary. He must make the journey."

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

* * *

Brian spent a wretched day. He remained extremely uneasy about Zoe. Whatever the urgency, he couldn't understand why she had gone with never a word to him. He had found out from the management that she had left all her luggage behind, and all her expensive dresses!

They had never seen her before and could give him no information about her. They hoped nothing unpleasant had happened. But as the value of her abandoned property was apparently greater than the amount of her unpaid bill, they weren't so deeply concerned as otherwise they might have been.

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

Brian gave a great sigh of relief.

He had built up a pyramid of doubts based upon her disappearance. These included the theory that Mr. Ahmad was a traitor in Sir Denis's camp; that Sir Denis was losing his grip and didn't recognize friend from

enemy.

This telegram shattered these delusions, lifting a dreadful load from his mind.

Perhaps he would never see Zoe again, but she had given him many hours of happiness and, after all, he wasn't in Cairo to enjoy himself!

During the remainder of the evening he wrote a long letter to her, addressed c/o J. Jansen, but never wandered far from the hotel, expecting Nayland Smith to walk in at any moment.

But up to the time that he went in to dinner Sir Denis hadn't appeared.

He was about to stand up and go out on to the terrace for coffee when he saw him hurrying in his direction and accompanied by another man quite unmistakably English. Both wore evening dress.

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

"How do you do, Mr. Merrick!" Sir Nigel shook hands cordially. "Devil of a game you fellows have taken on! Smith's been telling me all about it."

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

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

Brian found an Embassy car waiting outside, and a few minutes later found himself in Sir Nigel Richardson's study. Coffee was passed around and an assortment of liqueurs offered by a butler who would have delighted P.G. Wodehouse;

also excellent cigars. A young attache, Captain Arkwright, joined the party and made notes from time to time. He was earnest, efficient, and highly excited.

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

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

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

"Your sudden appearance, Smith, has set me thinking. Rumours of this man's doings, nothing further, have come my way in spots as far apart as Teheran and Paris. What should you guess his age to have been the first

time you saw him?"

"I should have taken him for seventy—well preserved, but seventy."

Sir Nigel stared, watching Nayland Smith light his pipe.

"Then, for heaven's sake, if he's really still alive——"

"I know!" Smith snapped. "He's over a hundred! I have believed for a long time that he has mastered the secret of prolonged life. He's a scientific genius. But unless he's also a Chinese edition of the Wandering Jew I'll finish him one day!"

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

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

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

"A new diplomatic passport is ready, Smith." He glanced at the attache. "You have it there, Arkwright?"

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

"Transport?" Sir Denis snapped.

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

"And Mr. Merrick?"

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

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

"And the third passenger?"

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

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

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

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

"Why?" came with almost a fierce snap. "Do I look chewed up?"

"Not at all, Sir Denis! In fact, though I don't know the details, I consider you have made an amazing come-back."

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

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

Brian told him about the message from Mr. Jansen.

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

Brian stood up, too. "But where are we going?"

"New York . . . Good night, Merrick!"

* * *

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

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

"Not at all, sir. I got it myself—just by accident!"

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

"I have found them exciting already!" Brian laid his passport on the desk.

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

When Brian, back in his room, had put the neat little diplomatic passport in an inside pocket and locked the other documents in a suit-

case, he went downstairs and out into the garden.

And he was still lingering over it, wondering how soon they were to start for New York, when a boy came up with a radiogram. Brian tore it open—and felt his heart give a queer little jump.

It was from *Lola!*

* * *

Brian, I wonder if you realize that you left no address. I have only just found out through Thomas Cook agency where you are. Please reply how long staying in Cairo. Love. Lola.

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

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

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

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

ignored frowning faces, returning their frowns with smiles. He wished he could have made these people understand that he was a friend, that he regretted having to leave so soon a city which he had longed to see. . . .

Achmed sat smoking in the entrance to his cavernous shop.

Brian looked hard into the shadows beyond. But, today, he found no amber eyes watching him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was Mr. Ahmad!

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

Sir Nigel Richardson's chauffeur was standing outside to dispose of Brian's luggage in the big Embassy car. Four motorcycle police were lined alongside and a number of spectators had gathered, curious to get a glimpse of the distinguished visitor. They probably expected to see a Hollywood celebrity, and were plainly disappointed when Brian and Sir Denis came out and got into the car. Brian found another passenger inside, a tall, stooping man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and dark sunglasses, his chin buried in the upturned collar of his light topcoat.

As the car swept smoothly away with its escort:

“Oh, Merrick,” Nayland Smith said in his jerky fashion. “I want you to meet our fellow traveller, Dr. Otto Hessian. This is Mr. Brian Merrick, Junior, Doctor.”

The doctor acknowledged this introduction by nodding slightly.

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

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

“That’s a wonderful job, Sir Denis.”

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

And so for the second time Brian found himself speeding along the tree-lined road to the airport—and this time leaving Cairo behind.

He would dearly have loved to stay longer, for he had seen little more of the ancient Oriental city than is seen by a cruise passenger. He wondered if he would have a chance to return one day—and he wondered if he had treated Zoe badly. . . .

A surprise awaited him when they came to the airport.

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

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

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

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

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

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

journey. . .

Chapter 9

Brian stared from a window of the suite in the Babylon-Lido Hotel which he shared with Nayland Smith. Sir Denis, he knew, had been retained by Washington, and certainly they had done him royally in the matter of accommodation. Their suite was on the top floor, and from where he stood the view stretched right out to the Statue of Liberty. There was a penthouse apartment on the roof above them, occupied by Dr. Hessian. One room, he understood, was equipped as a laboratory.

Throughout the journey from Cairo he had never succeeded in getting a single word out of that distinguished but silent physicist; nor had the doctor once removed the dark glasses in his presence.

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

Only that morning he had tackled Nayland Smith on the subject.

And Nayland Smith had replied, "Cultivate patience, Merrick. There are long spells of idleness in a soldier's life, too. But when war starts he has his hands full. We're in just that position. I might have had desperate need of you in Cairo. As it chanced, I didn't. We got Hessian away without a hitch. But Dr. Fu Manchu's forces are here, in Manhattan!"

"What!"

"They are here—a group of thugs pledged to stop Hessian's work! How they'll operate I don't know. I can't tell you if I'll need your brawn or your brain. But I can assure you that you'll be an essential figure in the picture. This is by far the biggest thing I ever took on, and if it breaks me and Fu Manchu wins, it means the end of all we stand for."

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

"By arrangement with the management, Merrick, the elevator goes no higher than this floor. Visitors to the penthouse must use the stair. But the door is locked from the inside. You'll see a typed notice on it which says: 'Apply No. 420 B.'

That's this apartment. If anyone applies, take particulars and call Dr. Hessian. His secretary will answer. She's a young lady supplied by the

F.B.I.”

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

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

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

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

He was watching smoke from a distant steamer, hull-down on the skyline, when the penthouse phone buzzed. This was so unexpected that it startled him. He took it up.

“Hullo!”

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

“No.”

“Callers?”

“No one called.”

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

“Thanks, Sir Denis. I’ll take your advice.”

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

The bar was already well patronized, but he saw no one he knew. He sat down at a vacant table and ordered a champagne cocktail. He supposed he should be grateful to find himself back in his native land, but all the same a voice within kept asking, “Why New York? Why couldn’t it be London?” When his drink came and he had sampled it and lighted a cigarette he began to feel better. He recalled what someone had told him once, that Secret Service routine can be as dull as banking.

This thought consoled him, and he had just ordered a second cocktail when soft hands were pressed over his eyes from behind and a soft voice

said, "Guess, Brian! Who is it?"

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

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

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

"My dear!" Brian partly recovered from the glad shock, wondered about the way his heart was thumping. "Your being here is the answer to a prayer. It's impossible but true."

"Did you get my radiogram?"

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

Lola shook her head. A waiter was standing beside her. Brian ordered two champagne cocktails. As the waiter moved away:

"How could I?" Lola asked him. "I had to leave London an hour after I sent my message to you in Cairo. Madame had booked me for a flight leaving the same afternoon. I told you, Brian, we should meet again before long."

Brian's eyes devoured her. Lola, as always, was perfectly dressed, with that deceptive simplicity which only much money can buy. He was so overpowered by her appeal—her sudden presence—that he became almost tongue-tied.

"It will be sent on?"

"Of course. Everything that comes will be air-mailed to me here."

"You are staying here—in the Babylon-Lido?"

"I am! Madame believes in Michel representatives being seen in smart places."

"Lola—it's a miracle!"

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

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

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

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

"Are you free for dinner?"

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

* * *

Dr. Fu Manchu sat in a small room which apparently had no windows.

A single bright light shone down on to a large-scale plan pinned to a board, so that sometimes a shadow of his head or hand would appear on the plan as he bent forward to study it. The room was profoundly silent.

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

an ascending stair appeared at the other end of the corridor.

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

Of the three suites shown on the east side of the corridor that in the centre was marked 420B. 420A was on the north of it and 420C on the south. There were four smaller apartments on the west side, numbered from 421 to 424.

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

“Connect 420A.”

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

“You are unpacked and established?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Your transmitter is well concealed?”

“Yes, Master.”

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

A faint click and the order: “Connect 420C.”

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

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

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

“Remain where you are until further orders.”

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

Suite 420B, occupied by Sir Denis Nayland Smith, was entirely surrounded by agents of Fu Manchu!

* * *

While Brian, having booked a table, waited for Lola to join him in the Silver Grill, his reflections took an odd turn. There was a queer similarity between this meeting with Lola in New York and his meeting with Zoe in Cairo. They might have been planned by a producer too lazy to alter the

routine. Brian laughed silently, and wondered why so grotesque an idea had occurred to him as he saw Lola coming.

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

When they had ordered their dinner, and Lola had selected the right Bordeaux to go with it:

“I’m simply dying to hear what you’re doing in Manhattan, Brian,” she declared. “I thought your mysterious affairs were connected with the East, not the West.”

“So did I,” Brian admitted, then stopped.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You can’t!” she agreed; but the grey eyes were dancing with mischief. “Maybe it’s just as well. You might be prosecuted for libel! But tell me all about what you’re doing, Brian. Is Sir Denis all you expected him to be? Does he match up to your memories of him?”

“Well——” He frowned thoughtfully “He looks older. That’s to be expected, I guess. And of course he’s been through hell since I saw him in Washington. I have a hunch he’s lost some of his pep. But I’ll tell you he

can still get things done. He's great alright."

A waiter came to serve the first course, and when he had gone:

"What did you do in Cairo?" Lola wanted to know. "Any perilous adventures? I mean—male or female?"

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

"Tailed? By whom? What for?"

"Because they knew I was with Nayland Smith, I suppose."

Lola buttered a roll. "Who are *they*, Brian? I don't understand."

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

"How exciting! What's the plot?"

"Even if I knew—and I don't—I couldn't tell you, Lola."

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

"Sure. He's right here, in the Babylon-Lido."

"But Brian, dear, you must know what for. Is he looking for somebody?"

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

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

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

A page appeared at his elbow. "Mr. Brian Merrick?"

"Yes."

"Wanted on the phone."

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

"Thought I'd find you there, Merrick," Sir Denis snapped. "Don't bolt your dinner, but come up when you finish."

Lola knew before he spoke. "Wanted by the chief?"

She smiled—that slightly one-sided smile which made him want to kiss her, because it was part invitation and part mockery.

"You've guessed it, dear. But he was good enough to tell me not to hurry."

"In the case of Madame Baudin—that's Mrs. Michel—this would mean twenty minutes. But never mind. There's all my packing to do, and we

have lots of time ahead. . . .”

* * *

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

“News for you, Merrick. Your father’s coming tomorrow.” “That’s fine! I mailed a letter to him only this afternoon.” “The Senator is bringing some brass-hat from the Air Service. But they’ll both be disappointed if they expect to see Dr. Hessian. He declines to receive any visitors until his model is ready for a demonstration.”

“Why is the Air Service interested?” Brian wanted to know. “Because Hessian claims that his invention will put ‘em out of business!”

“What! That doesn’t make sense, Sir Denis.” “Think not?” Nayland Smith shot a quick glance at him. “You’re going to be surprised.” “What is it? A guided missile?”

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

“Good Lord! But can he really do it?” Nayland Smith stared at Brian with a grim smile. “Why do you suppose I risked my neck to get him here?” It was a sound argument in its way; and, “I begin to see,” Brian admitted, “some reason for all the precaution.” “Particularly now that Dr. Fu Manchu has traced him!” “I still don’t understand where Dr. Fu Manchu comes in.” “Then I’ll explain. I was retained by the United States government to get Hessian out of the hands of the Communists, to enable him to use his phenomenal brain for the side he belongs to. Dr. Fu Manchu has been retained by the Communists to see that he doesn’t do it!”

Brian was reduced to stupefied silence for a moment. He remembered saying to Lola, “All I know is that it’s something very big.” How big he hadn’t dreamed! Nayland Smith went on pacing about like a caged animal.

“Can you tell me one thing more, Sir Denis?” Brian ventured. “If you’re sure that agents of Dr. Fu Manchu are actually in New York, why don’t you have them arrested?”

Sir Denis turned, fixed him with a penetrating stare.

“Have you any idea, Merrick, how long I tried to trap Fu Manchu himself during the time I knew, as all Scotland Yard knew, that he was in London? Six years! And he’s still free! As for his unidentified agents, New York is an even tougher problem than London.” He knocked ashes from his pipe into a tray. “Dr. Fu Manchu is president of an organization

known as the Si-Fan. It has members throughout the East, Near and Far. It has agents in every city in Europe and every city in the United States. Its power is second only to that of Communism if not equal.”

He began to stuff some sort of coarse-cut mixture into the hot bowl of his pipe. Brian said nothing.

“Its greatest strength, Merrick, is in its secrecy. Few people have even heard of the Si-Fan. As a result, there’s never been any concerted action against it. If they can’t have Hessian’s invention themselves, the Reds don’t intend to let anyone else have it. Heaven knows what they’ll try. But it’s our job to guard Hessian until he passes his plans over to the United States. ...”

Chapter 10

In Egypt, not long afterwards, on a night when there was no moon in Cairo, something happened designed to have an important bearing upon affairs in New York.

A small, lean man, very dark-skinned, was discarding his cloak upon the doorstep of the house in which Brian had once taken shelter from the student rioters. When he stepped out on to the narrow street he wore only a black loin-cloth and a small, tightly-wound black turban.

The quarter had sunk into silence. Except for the distant sound of a pipe and the barely audible thud of a drum, nothing disturbed its stillness. The little man glanced once to right and left, then crossed the narrow street to the gate of the courtyard opposite. He peered through the bars. He could see the house opposite. He peered through the bars. He could see the house of the Sherif Mohammed, its projecting windows outlined against starlight. The windows were dark. Nothing stirred.

He clasped the metal bars, bare toes and fingers, and with the agility of a monkey climbed to the top. He dropped lightly on the other side, moved across the courtyard and surveyed the front of the building. Hesitating for a moment, he ran to the end and looking up, saw what he wanted.

A sturdy bougainvillaea covered the south wall. On the floor above were several windows. He mounted to the first of these at incredible speed, but found it securely fastened. He swung to another. It was slightly open. He held his ear against the narrow opening, listening intently. Then, inch by inch, he raised the window and dropped noiselessly inside the room.

Motionless, he lay where he had dropped. But there was no sound.

From his loin-cloth he pulled out a small flash-lamp; lighted it for a moment. His acute hearing had told him there was no one in the room. He was looking for the door. He found it.

In a matter of seconds he was out on a tiled corridor. Again he stood still, listening. He moved to the left, attracted by a sound of snoring; peered into an ante-room richly furnished, for it had a large window and the starlight was enough to enable this strangely endowed visitor to see all he wanted to see.

A fat man lay asleep on a cushioned divan—the man who had first come to the gate when Brian called to demand an interview with the Sherif Mohammed.

It was the ante-room of the women's quarter, the *harem*.

The keen eyes of the little dark man detected a doorway on the right of this ante-room. He crossed to it, went through, and found a descending stair. It led to another corridor.

Here, for the first time, he was at fault. But after cautiously opening several doors again, he found what he was looking for: another stair. He went down at extraordinary speed for one running in the dark—and found himself in the paved entrance hall of the house.

Now that his eyes were accustomed to the dim light he could evidently see as clearly as a cat. And he seemed to know just what he was looking for.

With complete assurance, and making no sound, he moved around the walls of the large and lofty apartment, and presently, near the entrance door which opened on the courtyard, he found what he sought. At the back of a small room intended for a porter's lodge there was a strong teak door, iron-studded, the woodwork bleached with age. A bunch of old-fashioned Arab keys hung on a hook beside it.

And the largest of these fitted the ancient lock.

A stone stair led the midnight intruder to the cellars. Here he used his flash-lamp without hesitation. He found stores of various kinds, including casks of wine which no True Believer would expect to find in the cellars of a descendant of the Prophet.

Pressing on farther he came to a smaller cellar, long and narrow. There was nothing in it. But on one side were two more of the heavy teak iron-studded doors. They differed from that at the top of the stair in one respect. Each had an iron grille in it. He had thrust the bunch of keys in his accommodating loin-cloth; was about to pull them out, then stopped dead, as if stricken motionless—a trick of many wild animals when surprised.

Quite still he stood, and listened.

The sound was very faint, but this man's senses were super-normal.

Someone was sleeping behind one of the doors!

He remained still for nearly a minute, debating what he should do. Then he crossed to the grille from behind which the sound came, peered in, could see nothing, and so shone a momentary ray from his lamp into the blackness.

“Who’s there?” came an instant challenge.

The little man switched the light off and glided from the cellar, silent as a phantom. He fled up to the porter’s lodge, relocked the door as he had found it, making more noise than he cared about, and came out into the entrance hall.

Here he stood still again to listen.

No sound.

In niches of the mosaic-covered wall were many rare porcelain pots and other beautiful objects. On some of those the little man shone brief flashes from his lamp . . .

He began to examine several windows facing on to the courtyard, selected one of them, opened it slightly, and slipped through like a lizard. Once outside, he succeeded in partly closing it again.

He was over the gate and across the street to the doorway where he had left his cloak with a silent agility more like that of some nocturnal animal than of any human being. . . .

* * *

Mr. Lyman Bostock, United States representative in Cairo, twirled a cigar between his finger and thumb and stared reflectively across at Sir Nigel Richardson, his British confrere, who lay in a split-cane lounge chair with an iced drink beside him in the hollow of the chair-arm provided for that purpose. Mr. Bostock’s study opened on to a balcony and the balcony over-hung a pleasant garden, shadowy on this moonless night.

“I’m only just finding it out,” Mr. Bostock remarked, with his soothing drawl; “but you’re a queer bunch, you Englishmen.”

“I happen to be Scotch.”

“Maybe that’s worse. But what I’m coming to is this: I hand it to you that there’s not much about this country you don’t seem to know—including all the crooks in Cairo!”

“That’s base ingratitude, Bostock! I’ll let you into a secret, Murdoch, whom you’ve met with me (he has confidential employment in our Embassy), is an ex-officer of Egyptian Police. That was in the days when *we* ran the show. And what Murdoch doesn’t know about the Cairo underworld could be put in a thimble. You asked me to find the right man. I found him.”

Mr. Bostock glanced at his watch, took a drink, and put his cigar back

in his mouth.

“Agreed. I accept the responsibility.”

“You don’t have to. We’re in this thing together. If your F.B.I. has unearthed a mare’s nest—and that’s my private opinion—there was no alternative so far as I can see. Course of action was left to you. What could you do? Neither you nor I could get a search warrant on a mere suspicion, particularly in the case of so highly respected a citizen as the Sherif Mohammed Ibn-el-Ashraf.”

“True enough. I could see no alternative to your suggestion—short of declining to act in the matter. But, with apologies to your British gift of understatement, it’s slightly unconstitutional!”

“Unconstitutional be damned! What do we stand to lose? Let’s examine the facts. Who knows you were asked to make this investigation?”

“Except yourself——”

“And Murdoch. I had to let him in.”

“Nobody but myself and Arkwright, who decoded the message.”

“Good. Let’s look at possible consequences. Suppose Alt gets pinched. It’s unlikely, but he might. He has a record, not only as a cat-burglar but also for jail-breaking. He’s escaped twice, and they’re still looking for him. To lock up Ali Yahya is about as useful as to try to hold an eel by the tail. He can climb up or down almost anything, slip in and out of incredibly narrow openings. He’s a living legend with the natives, who claim he can make himself invisible. They call him Ali al-Sehliya—Ali the Lizard.”

“I trust he lives up to it,” Bostock drawled. “But, all the same, suppose he gets . . . ‘pinched,’ I think you said?”

“Pinched was the word. You don’t seriously suggest he would tell the police that he was acting under instructions from the United States Embassy?”

Mr. Bostock stood up and refreshed their two glasses. Sir Nigel watched him, grinning mischievously, until he sat down again.

“No,” Bostock admitted. “He would probably choose to escape a third time and collect the price of his crime which you and I promised to pay!”

“That’s the answer!” Sir Nigel took a long drink. “Nobody knows we have seen him——”

“Except Murdoch!”

“Except Murdoch. And Murdoch provided him with a complete plan (which Ali memorized), of the house of the Sherif Mohammed.”

“Useful man, Murdoch,” Mr. Bostock murmured, looking again at his watch. “Also Scotch, no doubt?”

“Also Scotch.” Then Sir Nigel, too, consulted his wrist-watch. “Ali is about due back.”

“Pinched!” Mr. Bostock muttered. “He’s ouerdue.”

Sir Nigel shook his head, smiling. "Our reputations are in safe hands, Bostock! Think of how far he has to travel."

"Isn't Murdoch giving him a lift?"

Sir Nigel raised his black brows. "Really, my dear fellow! Do you want Murdoch pinched as well?"

"Meaning that Ali will have to walk here from the Muski?"

"Ali's methods of transport are his own secret."

They fell into silence, each thinking his own thoughts. A faint breeze arose, rustling the palm fronds outside and making a noise like the crackling of stiff paper. A faint perfume from some night-scented flower in the garden was wafted into the study. A large bat flew past the window.

So they sat when, unheralded by any sound, a small dark figure materialized on the balcony, glided into the room and performed humble *salaam*.

Mr. Bostock nearly dropped a cone of cigar ash on the carpet, but recovered himself in the nick of time. Sir Nigel, though equally startled, hailed the apparition in Arabic.

"Good evening, Ali Yahya."

"Good evening, Richardson Pasha."

"What have you to report, Ali?"

"It is true—what I was told. Someone is there!"

Mr. Bostock sprang up. "You say someone is there?"

But in his excitement he used English instead of Arabic, a language which he understood better than he spoke. Ali Yahya stared blankly. He had discarded his cloak and presented a queer figure in that sedately appointed room in his black loin-cloth and turban. Mr. Bostock corrected himself hastily, and Ali said again:

"Someone is there, *effendi*."

Bostock glanced at Sir Nigel. "We must get the exact facts, Richardson. You ask the questions. You're more fluent than I. Let him sit down. The man must be tired."

Ali accepted the invitation and dropped down, cross-legged, on the carpet. Then, speaking impassively in simple words, he described what he had found in the Sherif's cellar.

"You didn't see the face of this man?" Sir Nigel asked.

"No. He slept, it seems, like a desert fox, with one eye open. I obeyed my orders and came away quickly."

"That was wise, Ali. You did well. You relocked all doors?"

"And replaced the keys where I found them."

"No one saw you leave?"

"No one ever sees me, Richardson Pasha, when I do not wish to be seen."

From the drawer of a coffee-table Sir Nigel took out a wad of notes

fastened with an elastic band and tossed it across to Ali, who caught it deftly.

Ali Yahya *salaamed* so deeply that his forehead touched the carpet. “O, well of Justice!”

He tried to thrust the bundle of money into his loin-cloth, but had some difficulty in doing so. The “well of justice” was watching him.

“There must be many treasures in the house of the Sherif Mohammed, Ali?”

“It is true. The Seyyid Mohammed is very wealthy, Richardson Pasha.”

“So I believe. Tell me, O Ali, what is that you have concealed?” Ali Yahya produced a flash-lamp. “No, no! Something more bulky.”

Ali hesitated for one tremendous moment, his bright eyes flashing sideways to the balcony, then back again to meet the inflexible stare of Sir Nigel.

“I feared you might misjudge my motive, Richardson Pasha. For this reason I said nothing. But it seemed to me, O wise one, that in case a window which I was unable to close properly might arouse suspicion, it would be provident to leave evidence to show that a common sneak-thief had entered the house.”

“I see. Show us the evidence.”

With great reluctance Ali the Lizard drew out from his loincloth an object wrapped in a piece of faded silk. He opened the wrapping and held up a small *mibkharah*, or incense-burner, most delicately chiselled in pure gold, a relic of some sultan’s *hareem*, a museum piece, for which collectors would pay a fabulous price!

“Good heavens, Richardson!” Mr. Bostock gasped. “We can’t stand for this! He must hand it over!”

Ali Yahya was rewrapping the treasure. Sir Nigel tried to hide a grin.

“Do you prefer it to be found in Ali’s possession, or in the United States Embassy?”

Mr. Bostock dropped back in his chair with a groan. Ali, obeying a silent signal from Sir Nigel, faded away, disappearing silently over the wall of the balcony. A whispered farewell came out of the darkness.

“May your night be a glad one, O Fountain of Wisdom . . .”

“We know what we wanted to know,” Mr. Bostock admitted. “But what a price to pay!”

“Forget that, Bostock. Our problem is: What are we going to do now?”

Chapter 11

“Well, my boy!” Senator Merrick held Brian at arms’ length, sizing him up with shrewd hazel eyes. “You look righting fit. If official despatches from Cairo and the word of Sir Denis are to be credited, you have helped to pull off something that may well prove to be a turning point in military history.”

Brian felt his cheeks flush. “I had next to nothing to do with it, Father. All the credit belongs to Sir Denis.”

“So you say, Junior. And I like you none the less for it. But Sir Denis Nayland Smith is a brilliant man, and he wouldn’t have wanted you if he hadn’t had use for you. Dr. Hessian arrives at the psychological moment. If he can prove what he claims, it may be a means of stopping the President, my very good friend, from plunging us into war.”

“Just what does that mean, Father?”

“Well, it is a top secret—but there’s an order to the Chief of Staff, already drawn up, which only requires his signature. His military advisers favour it. I don’t, and I’m not alone in my opposition. This country, Brian, is dangerously open to air attack with modern missiles. We should step warily.”

Nayland Smith was talking to General Rawlins and another Air Force official, and at this moment he brought them across. Brian had already met both that morning.

“I’m getting into hot water!” Sir Denis declared. “These fighting men tell me they expect orders by this week-end which seem to me to mean a shooting war.”

“And to me,” Senator Merrick agreed. “But nothing’s signed yet.”

“It will be signed not later than three days from now.” General Rawlins spoke with calm confidence. “For my part, I doubt the claims of this German scientist, in spite of all we’ve heard—and that’s not much. In the first place, I don’t expect open hostilities to start. In the second place, if they do, the Air Force hasn’t been asleep.”

“The trouble about democracy,” Brian Merrick Senior growled, “is that it speaks with too many voices all at the same time.”

“It’s no good flying off the handle, General,” Nayland Smith snapped, “because Dr. Hessian refuses to see you until his plans are complete. I warned you of this before you left Washington, so don’t blame *me*. He’s a genius, and he’s been through hell. He doesn’t give a damn for you or anybody else. He cursed me in German when I told him you were coming. Fortunately, I don’t know much German.”

“But when,” General Rawlins demanded, “will these plans of his be complete?”

“So far as I can make out, in the next two days.”

“When he’ll graciously consent to see us?”

“His proposal is this: As soon as he’s ready to give a demonstration, he will receive a committee of responsible Service officers, scientists and policy makers, to be selected by Senator Merrick as acting for the President. To me this seems fair and reasonable.”

“And the President will agree with you,” Senator Merrick declared. “World tension is reaching a peak; and I can assure you of the President’s keen interest.... Have I your permission, Sir Denis, to take my son to lunch at my club?”

* * *

Out of darkness complete except for one point of green light which might have been the eye of some nocturnal animal, Fu Manchu’s voice spoke:

“It is certain that Brian Merrick Junior is ignorant of my purpose?”

A dull, mechanical voice replied: “There is no evidence to the contrary.”

“You have not answered my question.”

“His behaviour gives cause for confidence, Excellency.”

“Explain your meaning.”

“He lunched at Senator Merrick’s club.”

“He was closely covered?”

“It was difficult. But an agent of The Order waited upon their table. He was, of course, very attentive.”

“Their conversation?”

“Chiefly concerned Sir Denis Nayland Smith.”

“It was satisfactory?”

“Entirely.”

“And after lunch?”

“Brian Merrick Junior saw his father off. The Senator was joined by two Air Force officers, who had lunched with Sir Denis at the Babylon-Lido.”

“Retain all contacts. Report hourly.”

The Si-Fan was watching . . .

* * *

When Brian returned to the suite in the Babylon-Lido (of which he had a key) he was in a queer frame of mind. Sir Denis sat writing; looking up, nodded.

“Decent lunch, Merrick? Don’t think too well of the catering at these University clubs, myself.”

“The lunch was all right. But I didn’t like the waiter.”

Nayland Smith laid his pen down. “Why not? Did he upset your soup?”

Brian grinned, but not happily. “No. He listened to everything I said to my father!”

“Hullo!” Sir Denis stood up quickly. “So the Reds have agents in the best clubs! I warned you, Merrick. What were you talking about?”

“Well—I tried to keep my father off the topic of Dr. Hessian’s invention. But, of course, he never seemed to suspect that a club servant might be a spy.”

“No. I see the difficulty. You’re pretty sure the man was listening?”

“Dead sure!”

Nayland Smith began to walk about in his restless way.

“The climax is so near. And we have two enemies, not one: the Reds and the Si-Fan! It’s a formidable combination, Merrick. I’m backed by two governments, but I doubt if my double backing’s as good as Dr. Fu Manchu’s! We have worked like beavers to keep Hessian’s presence here a secret. We have failed.”

Brian thought for a minute. “It seems to me that it wasn’t to be expected we could do that, Sir Denis. As I see it, all we have to do is to make sure he’s safe. And on that point I have something to say.”

Nayland Smith checked in his promenade, darted one of his swift glances at Brian.

“What is it?” he snapped.

“Just this. Sometimes, when I’ve been alone here, I have heard someone being admitted through the penthouse door. I’m sure of it. And I hear all sorts of footsteps above. If this suite is supposed to be a sort of guard-room, and we’re responsible for Dr. Hessian’s safety, shouldn’t we be advised of who is being allowed to go up?”

Nayland Smith knocked out his pipe, then produced the old pouch. He began to stuff tobacco into the cracked briar bowl.

“Point a good one,” he snapped. “*We* are responsible. But the F.B.I., operative attached to Hessian has authority to admit visitors whose identity we don’t know. I’m not disputing his integrity. Fact remains, responsibility is ours. I’ll see to this, Merrick. You’re right.”

Sir Denis lighted his pipe and walked out.

But, when he had gone, Brian remained uncomfortably ill at ease. Up to the time of their arrival at the Babylon-Lido, Nayland Smith had seemed to be so firmly in charge of operations. Now, something was lacking.

Had his phenomenal success in smuggling the German scientist

through the Iron Curtain, in getting him from Cairo to New York, induced Sir Denis to relax—too soon? It didn't seem to fit in with the man's dynamic character. Surely, now was the crucial hour—in fact, he had said so. What was wrong?

In his very bones, Brian had a foreboding that something pended which he didn't understand. He was conscious of a longing to talk it all over with some reliable and sympathetic friend, someone he could trust.

Lola was both reliable and sympathetic . . . But he was bound to secrecy!

Brian walked about for some time in an unhappy frame of mind; smoked countless cigarettes. Once, hearing faint footsteps in the corridor, which seemed to pause at the far end, he crossed the lobby and quietly opened the door; looked out.

He was just in time to see the door to the penthouse stair closing!

"Damn!" he muttered—for he had caught not even a glimpse of the person who had gone in.

Listening intently, he detected the unmistakable click of a key being turned in a lock.

This irritated him unreasonably. His job, so far as he could see, remained that of an attendant; a sort of paid companion for Nayland Smith. Plots and counter-plots involving the security of the United States seethed around him, but he had no part to play.

Never once had he entered the penthouse since Dr. Hessian had taken up residence there; nor once set eyes upon him from the time of their arrival to the present moment.

It was a humiliating position—or so it seemed to him, now.

The phone on the big desk buzzed.

"Hullo!" he called.

"Oh, Brian, I'm so glad I caught you!" . . . *Lola*'. "When do you expect to be free? I can be in the Paris Bar around cocktail time. Any hope?"

"Where are you now, Lola?"

"At Michel's. But for mercy's sake don't call me back, here! I'll wait downstairs until seven, Brian. Do try!"

And she hung up.

Brian glanced at his watch. Five o'clock. Then he stood quite still, listening. French windows opened on a balcony were partly open. . . . and he could hear voices from above. Someone was talking on the terrace of the penthouse.

He opened the windows fully, but silently, and stepped out.

A strange voice, alternately guttural and sibilant, spoke slowly, with impressive pauses. Something in this voice touched a chord of memory, but so faintly that no idea of the speaker's identity was conjured up. It bore a vague resemblance to the rarely-heard speech of Dr. Hessian. But

the language was neither German nor English. It was a language which Brian knew he had never heard before.

There were occasional replies; monosyllables in the same tongue.

Once, Brian was almost sure, the name "Nayland Smith" was introduced into the otherwise unintelligible jargon. But he knew he might be mistaken, for if it had in fact been that name, it was so mispronounced as to be barely recognizable.

The conversation ended abruptly. He heard a shuffle of footsteps, and knew that the speakers had gone in. ...

* * *

"You made it, Brian!" Lola stood up to greet him as he hurried into the Paris Bar. "I nearly gave up hope. This is my second cocktail! Did the Big Chief have a heart, after all?"

Brian dropped into a chair facing her. He longed to have her in his arms; but this was not the time. And he felt oddly dispirited.

"When at last he came in, I told him about one or two queer things that had happened, and he said boredom was getting on my nerves and ordered me to forget the job and play a while."

He looked up at a waiter who had just appeared and ordered two more cocktails.

Lola checked him. "Not another for me, Brian. I'll finish on this one."

Brian didn't argue. He knew Lola. And when the waiter went off:

"Surely you're through for the day, Lola?" he asked.

"Yes." She was watching him, smiling. "But I like to stay sober all the same. What were these queer things that happened, Brian?"

"Oh!" He lighted a cigarette. Lola already was smoking. "We seem to have some curious neighbours up above us in the penthouse. I overheard somebody talking in a queer sort of jargon and mentioned it to Sir Denis."

"He probably said that representatives of United Nations lived there?"

"No. He didn't say that." Brian tried to draw a cloak of secrecy about himself, but wasn't quite successful. "For a man on a dangerous mission—or so I understand—he brushed it off very lightly. Between ourselves, there are times when I wonder if Sir Denis is really up to his old form."

"Please, Brian!" Lola smiled her one-sided smile. "Don't talk Oxford. After all, you're still an American."

Brian grinned almost happily. Lola's impudent criticism of his occasional traces of English idiom and speech, far from annoying, delighted him. It proved her interest, or so he argued. His cocktail arrived; he sampled it.

"Maybe I mean he's getting too old for his job."

Lola frowned thoughtfully, twirling her glass between sensitive fingers. "As I haven't met him I can't judge, Brian. But there's just one thing I'd like to know. The first time you saw him in Cairo did you think he had changed?"

Brian considered the question; decided that no harm could be done by telling Lola the facts.

"That makes me think, Lola. The first time I saw him in Cairo was under very peculiar circumstances. It's quite a story."

And he outlined the incident which had led him to take refuge on the roof of a house overlooking that of Shertf Mohammed, and told her what he had seen from there. . . .

"There was no mistake about it, dear. The way he gripped his pipe, the trick of twitching the lobe of his ear. I knew I was looking at Nayland Smith.

"How excited you must have been! And after that?"

Now well in his stride, and delighted to have Lola for an audience, Brian related how he had demanded an interview with the Sherif and what had happened there.

"So you didn't see him," Lola murmured. "When *did* you see him again?"

Brian gave her an account of Sir Denis's secret entrance to his hotel apartment, and equally secret exit.

"Was it then, Brian, when you actually talked to him, that you began to wonder if he had outlived what you call 'his old form'?"

"Not exactly right then, Lola——"

Brian paused, finished his cocktail. He had thought of something; and the thing, though perhaps trivial, had staggered him, chiefly because he had never thought of it before.

"Then when, dear?"

"Later, I guess. But—when Sir Denis came to see me he had a strip of surgical plaster on the bridge of his nose."

"Had he been in a fight?"

Lola asked the question jokingly. But her grey eyes weren't smiling.

"He'd had one hell of a time getting out of the hands of the Reds. But that's not the point. Something which he didn't tell me must have happened right there in Cairo. Because, when I saw him pacing around that room, and I saw him clearly, there was no plaster on his nose!"

* * *

One of the hourly reports ordered by Dr. Fu Manchu was just coming in. That solitary spark of green light glowed in the darkness. . . .

“Brian Merrick’s complete ignorance of Operation Zero confirmed.”

“He has served his purpose, and could be dispensed with. Henceforward he becomes a possible source of danger. . . . Where is he now?”

“In the Sunset Room.”

“He is covered?”

“Closely, Excellency”

“What Federal operatives are on duty there?”

“Two F.B.I. agents.”

The green light disappeared. And, invisible in the darkness, Dr. Fu Manchu laughed. . . .

* * *

In the popular but expensive Sunset Room high up in the Babylon-Lido, with its celebrated dance band and star-spangled floor show, Brian found himself transported to Paradise. With Lola in his arms, wearing an alluring dance frock, he was lost to the world, lifted above all its petty troubles—a man rapturously in love.

His frustrations, doubts and fears had dispersed like mist under the morning sun.

“Are you happy, dearest?” he whispered.

“Very happy, Brian.”

He was silent for a long time, living in a dream.

“I often wonder, Lola, in your wanderings about the world, if you ever met someone else who meant more to you than I do.”

“There’s no one who means more to me than you, Brian. But, like you, dear, I have a job to do. We’re both young enough to enjoy ourselves without spoiling it by getting serious, yet awhile.”

Brian drew a long breath, made fragrant by the perfume of her hair.

“You mean you’d rather stay with Michel than cut it out to marry me?”

Lola sighed. “I told you once before, Brian dear, that early marriages, so popular in our country, are often failures.”

“But not always.”

“Brian, we’re happy! Maybe we’ll never capture this wonderful thing again. *Please* don’t get serious—tonight!”

He swallowed, but found enough discretion to respect her wishes, to surrender himself to the spirit of the dance. As always, Lola was elusive—and all the more maddeningly desirable. He was silent for some time, until:

“There’s a man standing over by the door,” he said, “who seems to be watching us. Do you know him?” “Which one do you

mean, Brian?” “The tall, dark fellow just lighting a cigarette.” Lola laughed. “No, I don’t know him, Brian. But I’m willing to bet he’s the house detective!”

Chapter 12

Brian returned to the suite earlier than he had intended. Lola had been paged just before the star entertainer appeared, and returned, looking very wretched, to tell him that Madame Michel had taken up residence in the Babylon-Lido that night and would remain until her forthcoming dress show there took place. Madame insisted upon an immediate conference in her apartment. ...

He found Nayland Smith at the desk reading what looked like an official document, and smoking as usual, like a factory chimney. The suite was luxuriously furnished, in Babylon-Lido style, and a tall, painted Italian screen enclosed the desk, so that the limited space around it had the quality of a fog. Sir Denis looked up when Brian came in.

“Hullo, Merrick! A rumour reaches me that you were seen in the Sunset Room with a very pretty girl. Don’t apologize! You have had a dull time, I know. Glad you can find agreeable company.”

“Thanks, Dir Denis—though I can’t imagine who told you.”

Nayland Smith smiled. But, again, it wasn’t the happy smile which Brian remembered—a smile which had seemed to sweep the years aside and reveal an eager boy.

“One of the F.B.I. men detailed to keep an eye on you!”

“On *me*? Why?”

Sir Denis tossed the typescript aside; stood up.

“Merrick, we’re marked men!” The smile vanished. His face became grim. “If Fu Manchu could trap either of us it would give him a lever with Washington—that he’d know how to use. I have warned you before. Trust nobody—not even a taxi driver you may pick up outside the hotel.”

“But——” A hot protest burned on Brian’s tongue, for he detected an implication that Lola was suspect; checked the words. “You suggest that this man would try to hold us?”

“And could succeed, Merrick. Remember how long I was held! He has not only the Si-Fan behind him, but the Reds as well!” He began to pace up and down. “Dr. Fu Manchu has little time left. Tomorrow night Dr. Hessian has agreed to give a demonstration!”

“Tomorrow night!”

“A committee formed by your father, and approved by the President,

will be here. Not one word of this must leak out. Their visit is a top secret. . . . And Fu Manchu would stop at nothing to prevent it!”

* * *

Sleep didn't come easily to Brian that night. Between uneasy dozes, he found himself trying to figure out if Lola really had been called to attend upon "Madame", or if she was avoiding being left alone with him, and trying to convince himself that Dr. Hessian's invention was not a mirage, the dream of a mad scientist, but all that Nayland Smith believed it to be. He drove himself near to a mental frenzy.

That Sir Denis deliberately kept him in the dark concerning certain vital facts of the business was beyond dispute. Why? Didn't he trust him?

Crowning mystery—which he had never been able to fathom—for what possible reason had he been employed? Those qualifications stipulated in *The Times* advertisement, all of which he possessed, had never been called upon. For all that had happened to date, almost anybody, graduate or coal miner, athlete or cripple, would have done as well!

He switched on the bedside lamp, saw that the time was 2 a.m., and got up to get a drink. He didn't want whisky; he was really thirsty; and there was beer in the icebox. He made his way to the kitchenette and opened a can.

As he poured out the cold beer, he wondered if Nayland Smith had gone to sleep, and, carrying the glass in his hand, walked bare-footed to Sir Denis's door to find out.

His door was open—and even in the dim light Brian could see that the bed was unoccupied. There was no light in the living-room.

He stood for a moment, hesitating. Then went out to the lobby.

The door of the suite was unlocked!

In view of what Nayland Smith had told him earlier that night, and of Sir Denis's insistence that the door must always be locked and bolted at night, this was more than puzzling. . . .

"We're marked men! If Fu Manchu could trap either of us——"

He remembered the very words.

What was he to think?

Brian knew that he had dozed more than once, but if there had been any struggle it couldn't have failed to arouse him.

And while he stood there in a state of hopeless indecision a sound came which confirmed all his fears. It came from the penthouse.

A pistol shot! ... A second ... a third! Then—a muffled explosion, which shook the apartment!

Brian ran back to the living-room, spilling beer as he went.

He switched the light on, set the glass down and crossed to the penthouse phone. . . . Before his hand touched it the instrument began to buzz!

As he took it up: "That you, Merrick?" came Nayland Smith's snappy voice.

"Yes. What's happened? Shall I come up?"

"No. Stay where you are. Dr. Hessian called me an hour ago. He had decided upon a test experiment. It was successful. Probably have most of the residents of the Babylon-Lido phoning like mad! Turn in. All's well."

And Sir Denis hung up.

Brian wondered if he should obey orders and lock the outer door; decided against it, and went back to bed. . . .

* * *

He woke early in the morning, vaguely aware of disturbed dreams in which Nayland Smith had become transformed into a sort of prehistoric monster about to devour him and had then vanished in a cloud of smoke.

Wondering why he felt so jaded, he gave an order for coffee and went into the bathroom. If Sir Denis had returned or not he didn't know, and for some reason didn't care. There was no sound in the suite. He was finishing up with an ice-cold shower when the waiter came into the living-room.

Brian called out, "Leave my coffee in there, waiter."

"All ready." But the man lingered, drew nearer to the open bathroom door. . . . "Explosion upstairs last night, I hear. Did it wake you?"

Brian hesitated, towel in hand. He must be cautious.

"Yes, it did. Any damage?"

"Not that I've heard. One of those pressure cookers blew up, I'm told. But nobody hurt."

"Lucky. I wondered what had happened. . . ."

He was drinking coffee and glancing over the morning newspapers which the man had brought up when Sir Denis burst in. He was dressed in one of his well-cut and well-worn tweed suits, so that evidently he, too, had been an early riser.

"Good morning, Merrick. Sorry about last night. Started a lot of rumours. Not good for us. One thing certain. Hessian is a genius compared with whom Einstein was a beginner! I want you with me up there tonight—and you're going to see a miracle. . . ."

When, soon afterwards, Nayland Smith dashed out again, saying that he had an important conference at police headquarters, Brian was left as much in the dark as he had been before Sir Denis dashed in. Mingled with

the promised excitement of what the night had in store was a growing resentment at being treated like a figure of no consequence where the big issues at stake were concerned.

Irritably, Brian looked at his watch, and decided that it wasn't too early to call Lola. He asked to be put through to her apartment. She answered almost at once.

"Did I wake you, dear?"

"No, Brian. I'm all ready to go out. A long day ahead at Michel's, and I was up so late last night. Heaven only knows when I'll be through. This was the job I was brought here to do. I have to pass all the models who'll display Michel's creations at the show!"

"Poor darling! Any hope for lunch?"

"Not a shadow. It will be sandwiches and coffee on Fifth Avenue. If I can make it between seven and eight for a quick drink I'll call you."

Brian's spirits sank to zero. The Washington committee, headed by his father, was due at eight o'clock.

"I'm afraid I may be tied up by then, Lola. But call all the same. We might fix something later. . . ."

It was a seemingly interminable morning. Around one o'clock Sir Denis called to say that Brian could leave the suite for his lunch provided he didn't leave the building. . . . "Acting on your advice, I have made other arrangements to safeguard the penthouse. But in case I'm delayed, stand by to receive your father's party from seven on."

Brian lingered over his lunch and then wandered about the huge hotel hoping to find somebody he knew; but, as happens on such occasions, without success. Merely to kill time, he dropped into a lounge in one of the public rooms and ordered coffee.

A strange-looking man sauntered by. He was young, dark-complexioned and handsome in a sinister way, with large, black and brilliant eyes. Otherwise conventionally dressed in European fashion, he wore a blue turban. He seemed to take an unwholesome interest in the younger women present.

Just then, the waiter brought Brian's coffee, and:

"Is the character in the blue turban staying here, waiter?" Brian asked.

The waiter nodded. "Sure he is, sir. They tell me he's an Indian prince. All I know is he has a servant with him that looks like a gorilla. I've taken orders to their apartment."

Finally, Brian bought a bundle of newspapers and magazines and went upstairs to try to amuse himself until the committee arrived. It was important that he should distract his thoughts from hazy doubts and misgivings that crowded upon him. . . .

Almost on the stroke of seven, his father arrived—alone.

"This is a very wonderful occasion, my boy," he declared;

“and you’re entitled to be proud that you’ve been chosen to take part in it. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs is coming, General Jenner, General Dowson of the Air Force, and Admiral Druce, representing the Navy. Last, but not least, Dr. Jurgonsen, the physicist and the President’s personal adviser on development of atomic projects. Where is Sir Denis? With Dr. Hessian, I suppose?”

“I don’t know, Father,” Brian confessed. “But he warned me that he might be detained.”

Brian Merrick Senior nodded. “A man carrying a heavy load of responsibility on his shoulders.”

The party assembled in ones and twos, Nayland Smith last except for Dr. Jurgonsen. Sir Denis looked physically exhausted—or so Brian thought. The three Service officers (all of them in mufti) were so typical of their services as to be without individual characteristics. They showed one trait in common; a reserved but unmistakable hostility for each other.

At three minutes after eight the physicist arrived, a spare grey man in powerful spectacles and a bad temper. He looked around irritably.

“To the devil with New York taxi drivers,” he remarked. “The one I hired didn’t know the way to the Babylon-Lido!”

The three officers transferred their mutual hostility to the civilian. But Senator Merrick tried to pour oil on troubled waters, as Nayland Smith said:

“If you will be good enough to follow me, gentleman, we will now proceed to the demonstration.”

They filed out and long the corridor to the penthouse door, which proved to be open. Brian’s curiosity rose to fever pitch. This was his first visit to Dr. Hessian’s hideaway. There was another door at the top of the stair which was opened by an expressionless Japanese who wore a white tunic.

He led them through a lobby crowded with oversized trunks and cases and into what was evidently the main room of the penthouse. Although french windows were opened, so that the light-studded panorama of Manhattan could be seen stretched out below the terrace, the air was heavy with some pungent chemical odour.

The Japanese, apparently Dr. Hessian’s assistant, closed the door as the last of the party came in.

“Here, gentlemen, as you see, we shall witness a demonstration of Dr. Hessian’s supreme achievement.”

All eyes became focussed on a long, narrow table in the middle of the room. It was entirely covered by a large-scale plan of Manhattan from the Battery to the Bronx. Roughly midway on the plan a miniature radio mast stood.

Three large metal balls of some dull metal that looked like lead were

suspended above the table from the lofty ceiling. Hanging down lower than these was a small box.

Ten chairs were placed around, four on either side and one at each end.

“Your places are marked, gentlemen,” the Japanese receptionist told them in perfect English. “Writing materials are provided.”

They sorted themselves out, and Brian found himself beside Nayland Smith. Senator Merrick had been placed at one end of the long table.

“Stand by to make notes of anything worth remembering, Merrick,” Sir Denis rapped in his staccato fashion.

He seemed to be highly strung, or so Brian thought. Nor was he the only one. When everybody was seated, only two chairs remained vacant. That to the left of Dr. Jurgonsen and that facing Senator Merrick at the other end of the table. A hum of conversation arose, and Brian detected a theme of incredulity running through it.

“Looks like a new gambling game,” Admiral Druce growled. “Where do we put our chips?”

But silence fell suddenly when a strange figure appeared in an inner doorway. A tall man, stooping slightly, he, also, wore a white tunic, as well as tinted glasses, a small skull cap, and gloves which appeared to be made of black rubber.

“Gentlemen,” the Japanese assistant announced in his toneless English: “Dr. Otto Hessian.” Dr. Hessian rested one hand on the back of his chair and nodded. “Allow me, Doctor, to introduce your visitors.”

And beginning with Senator Merrick, as chairman of the committee, he named them one by one, finishing with “Mr. Brian Merrick Junior.”

Dr. Hessian nodded to all and then sat down. He put some typed pages before him, so that they partly hid the Bronx.

“If you please,” he began in a guttural voice and a very marked German accent, “of English I have not enough properly to explain myself. So these notes I have had translated from German more clear to make it—what I have to say.”

There was a faint murmur of sympathy. Evidently Dr. Hessian could see quite well through his dark glasses, for he now consulted his notes and went on, speaking better English but with no better accent:

“Sound vibrations, like all others of which we have knowledge, move neither straight up nor straight along, but, so—” One black-gloved hand described an arc. “They conform to the shape of the envelope in which the earth is enclosed: our atmosphere. Very well. There are sound vibrations, many of them inaudible to our ears, which can shatter a glass goblet. There are others, fortunately rare under normal conditions, which are even more destructive. Such a vibration I have succeeded in producing.”

He raised his head, looked around. But although one or two of his audience stirred restlessly, no one spoke.

“It is not only inaudible, but no receiver yet invented (except mine) can transmit it. So. It is as simple as this. Very well. Above my target area, in this case”—he laid a hand on the plan—”Manhattan, a plane flies at a given elevation. The antenna projecting above this plane carries a special receiver from which this vibration inaudible to human ears is cast upon the atmosphere. The plane, although in fact below the denser sound-belt, is immunized.”

Another voice broke in. “Dr. Hessian! Your words, so far, leave me more completely mystified than ever. What do you mean by ‘the denser sound-belt?’”

Dr. Hessian looked up from his notes, and stared at the questioner.

“It is Dr. Jurgonsen who speaks? I thought this. No doubt you speak also German? Be so good, Doctor, as you question to repeat in German.”

And then began a heated exchange in that language, which rose to a pitch of violence. At this point Senator Merrick banged his hand on the table.

“Gentlemen! In the first place, many of the committee don’t know what you’re talking about. In the second place, you are delaying the demonstration which we are here to see.”

Dr. Hessian nodded and looked down again at his notes.

“I am far from being satisfied,” Dr. Jurgonsen muttered.

“The demonstration will explain my words,” Hessian’s guttural voice continued. “My assistant will now lower the objects which you see suspended there.”

These “objects”, which had excited so much interest, were attached to hooks in the ceiling by slender metallic cords, the ends of which had small rings. These hung down over the table. The Japanese assistant lowered the one suspended above the Battery.

“Open please the container,” Dr. Hessian directed.

The halves of the dull metal ball opened on a hinge.

And the ball contained a large coconut!

Everybody laughed, except Dr. Jurgonsen. “Preposterous!”

he choked. But Dr. Hessian, quite unmoved, went on to explain:

“This nut, although out of proportion to the scale of the plan, represents an enemy dive bomber which has penetrated the air defences and will presently swoop down upon lower Manhattan to discharge its load of destruction. These containers are immunized against any sound vibration. Close and return, please.”

The metal ball was re-closed and hoisted back to its place.

“Each of these has a trigger on the top which releases the contents when a ball is raised to touch the ceiling,” the guttural voice explained.

“And now, the guided missile which could destroy the whole city.”

A second metal ball, hanging over mid-town New York, was lowered. It was evidently very heavy. The Japanese, leaning over between Admiral Druce and General Rawlins, opened the container. In it, point downward, and carefully held in place by the Japanese, lay what looked like a miniature torpedo.

“Here is a scale model of the latest guided missile, with an atomic warhead—as it would reach our atmosphere with what I may term its outer garments discarded.”

Those further removed from the centre of the table stood up and eagerly grouped behind Admiral Druce and General Rawlins for a close view of the model.

“I completed it in Cairo,” Dr. Hessian told them. “Only externally is it true to type. It weighs nearly eight pounds and has a small charge of high explosive for the purpose of this demonstration. It is so weighted that it will fall nose downward. Close and return, please.”

Looking puzzled and excited, everybody went back to his place as the metal ball was swung up again to the ceiling. Dr. Jurgonsen shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“Exhibits A and B I have shown you,” Dr. Hessian carried on his guttural monotone—due, perhaps to the fact that he was reading his English transcription. “Exhibit C, just above me, represents a sneak raid” (he had difficulty with the words) “on the Bronx.”

The metal ball nearly above his head was lowered. He opened it himself, and displayed a Service revolver!

“I shall detach the weapon from its container.” He did so. “Because, in this case, it remains there throughout the experiment. It is set at safety. But, before I return it, the revolver will be ready to fire. I shall request General Rawlins to confirm the fact that the cartridges are live.”

It was passed to that officer, who took out several shells and nodded, replaced them and handed the weapon back to the doctor. He adjusted it and the metal ball was raised to its place.

“This exhibit is so adjusted,” Dr. Hessian explained, “that whenever the trigger of the receiver is brought in contact with the ceiling the revolver fires a shot at the Bronx. And now, my final exhibit: the small box which you see suspended roughly above the centre of Manhattan. Time prohibited the preparation of a model of an aeroplane resembling the one I have described. Therefore, if you please, imagine that this is such a plane. Its height above the city is out of proportion with the scale. An altitude of three miles would be enough. But I have set it much higher purely in the interest of your safety. I beg, from the moment contact is made—watch for the red light—that you will all remain *seated*. On no account stand up.”

Brian experienced a wave of almost uncontrollable excitement. He noted that Nayland Smith's hands were clenched below the table. Every face he looked at registered high nervous tension.

The Japanese moved to a small side table and opened a cabinet which stood there.

"A very ordinary transmitter, gentlemen," came the guttural tones. "Such as any amateur can make. But a mechanism is attached which no one but myself could make. It transmits the lethal note which can throw a protective umbrella over the whole of the New York City! Proceed . . ."

Brian held his breath, and looking upward saw a speck of red light glow in the suspended "receiver". There was no sound.

"Contact is established," Dr. Hessian declared. "The enemy approaches."

The unemotional Japanese returned to the centre table.

"Hold out your hands, Senator Merrick," the new commanding voice ordered. "Prepare to catch the debris of the dive bomber."

Brian saw his father's colour change slightly; but he stretched out his hands, looking up.

The metal ball opened. The big coconut fell. . .

But well above the heads of the seated committee it was shattered to bits!

Fragments of shell and pulp shot miraculously across space to be piled against the walls!

An almost hysterical, concerted gasp told of the reactions of the committee.

"And now, if you please, the guided missile." Dr. Hessian looked up from his notes. "You will note, Dr. Jurgonsen, that any hollow object it is burst instantly on contact with my sound belt. Had you so indiscreet been as to stand up, imagine what happens to your head!"

Before Dr. Jurgonsen could think of a suitable reply, the second metal ball was opened.

The miniature projectile fell swiftly. Several heads were ducked, protective arms raised.

There was a shattering explosion. Fragments of metal spurted across the room as the shell of the coconut had done. Plaster fell from walls as they became spattered with this shrapnel. But not one particle fell on the table or on the surrounding carpet:

"The guided missile is dispersed." Dr. Hessian spoke calmly. "In practice the inaudible sound would be greatly amplified. There would be a thunderstorm far above New York of a violence which no man has ever heard. But nothing more. The protective belt would also be relayed to outlying points. I could throw up a ceiling of sound over the whole of New York City at a cost below that of maintaining a fighter squadron for a

month. And now, gentlemen, the sneak raid on the Bronx.”

As Dr. Hessian laid his hand on that section of the plan, the Japanese, standing beside him, head carefully lowered, stretched forward and grasped the suspended ring.

“Proceed.”

The ring was jerked sharply. A spurt of flame spat down out of the opening in the container. A dull impact ... a cloud of grey matter spread like smoke across the air, and a flattened bullet rebounded nearly to the ceiling in a ricochet and finally came to rest against a gap in the wall made by shrapnel from the “guided missile.”

Two more shots were fired, with similar results. The spectacle was bewildering, for the effect, looking upward, was as though a sheet of miraculously impenetrable glass extended across the room.

But there was nothing—nothing visible . . .

“Let no one stir,” Dr. Hessian warned. “Cover everything up.”

The Japanese went out and returned with several large sheets. One he spread over the table. Others were laid on the surrounding carpet.

“Disconnect.”

A switch was moved in the near-by cabinet . . . and as if a palpable obstacle had been drawn aside, down showered debris of all the experiments!

Chapter 13

At the conclusion of that amazing demonstration in the penthouse, Dr. Hessian had excused himself and retired. He had been at work day and night, he explained, ever since his arrival, and was far too weary for debate. He referred members of the committee to his assistant, Dr. Yukio Yono, who was qualified to answer all their questions.

Dr. Jurgonsen had tried to detain him, but Hessian had merely nodded and gone out.

Then the imperturbable Japanese scientist had been made the target of a verbal bombardment. But he had never faltered, never changed the tone of his voice, even when others were shouting. Nayland Smith had tapped Brian on the shoulder and nodded towards the door. Back again in their own quarters:

“We’re out of our depth, Merrick,” he told Brian, “up there. But words can’t alter facts.” He poured out two liberal shots of whisky. “Otto Hessian had solved the problem of protection from all form of aerial attack. You agree?”

"I can't doubt it. The thing's a miracle. It's magic."

"There's no difficulty whatever in throwing up this sound ceiling over a wide area. Strong feature is the low cost. Everybody's convinced, of course. But old Jurgonsen is boiling with professional jealousy. Your father has tried to persuade the Japanese to get Hessian to set up his apparatus in Washington for the President's okay. But Hessian blankly declines. Genius has its privileges. It's a case of Mohammed and the mountain. The President will come."

"Here?" Brian jerked, startled by such a proposal.

"Here, Merrick, and soon. You saw the vacant chair at the table? That's for your father. The place occupied by Senator Merrick tonight will be reserved for the President."

When presently the members of the committee re-assembled it was clear that their opinion was unanimous. Even Dr. Jurgonsen was forced to admit that Otto Hessian had broken new ground in the aerial defence problem, opening up a prospect of entire immunity on a remarkably low budget.

"Secrecy and speed are vital," he declared. "Dr. Hessian, whom I knew only by name, had vilely bad manners but clearly knows his subject."

"I'll see the President tonight," Senator Merrick promised. "It was arranged I should do so, however late I got back. Dr. Hessian is certainly a most irascible character, and I must persuade the President to come here, incognito, without delay, not later than tomorrow or Friday. Not a word of this must leak out. There will be no press conferences, gentlemen!"

"Every conceivable precaution has been taken," Nayland Smith assured him. "You all entered the hotel by a door not normally in use and came up in a reserved elevator."

"I thought the man on duty looked hard at me," Dr. Jurgonsen complained.

"Quite likely He's an F.B.I, operative!"

* * *

In a hotel bedroom a stockily-built Asiatic, with thick, sensual features and fierce eyes, was listening to a voice which came out of an open suitcase standing on a trestle. It was a sinister, sibilant voice, its curious quality enhanced by the language in which it spoke—Hindustani.

"You understand that this is the emergency called Project Zero?"

"I understand, Master."

"Is Nogai with you?"

"He is downstairs, Master."

"Order him to avoid the public rooms. He has attracted attention."

Because he is registered as a Rajah's son he must not act like one. Both remain in your apartment until further orders. Take your meals there. Now, repeat your emergency instructions."

"Yes, Master. At the signal——"

"Repeat the signal."

"Three raps on the door"

"Continue."

"The door will be unlocked on the other side and I unlock it on this side. I put all lights out. I open the door enough to see in, and wait for the man to come. The first time he has his back to me, I act."

"You must make no mistake."

"I never make mistakes, Master. Nogai and I open the big box and drag him in. We close the door; and wait for further orders."

"And if he is not alone?"

"Nogai goes to the front door and rings. Whichever one answers I deal with the other. Nogai deals with the man at the door."

"Silently!"

"Nogai's method is as silent as mine, Master . . ."

A few minutes later, a woman seated manicuring her fingernails was addressed by the same strange voice, speaking in French, from a cream leather toilet case on the table beside her. She started nervously, staring across the empty room with a haunted look in her eyes.

"I am here, Excellency," she replied, also in French—apparently her native tongue.

"A general emergency has arisen. You have maintained your contact with personnel at the airport?"

"I have."

"Make your own plans, provided I have no occasion to direct otherwise. You know already the information I must have. It is vital that this reaches me *at once*. When you notify me of the expected arrival you will be directed how to proceed. You understand?"

"I understand, Excellency."

"No orders, other than those preceded by the code-word Si-Fan, are to be accepted. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly."

"I count upon unremitting vigilance. Keep in constant touch wherever you are. Report hourly from the time you set out... ."

Dr. Fu Manchu leaned back in his chair, his ascetic face lined with anxiety. For more than an hour he had been assembling his forces for some secret purpose which might mean world chaos. He stood up wearily and crossed the small room without a window which he seemed to use as a remote control base. Even now it was only dimly lighted by a lamp on a buffet where there were no homely decanters but only an array of

chemical equipment and a large medicine chest containing many bottles and phials.

He took a measuring glass and prepared a draught composed of one part of a greenish liquid, two of amber and one of red. This he emptied carefully into a larger glass and filled it with distilled water. The contents bubbled slightly, became cloudy and then still. Dr. Fu Manchu began to drink, when a faint ring sounded. He turned. A speck of blue light had sprung up in the radio cabinet.

Returning to his chair, he moved a switch and spoke:

“What have you to report?”

A woman’s voice answered. “Earlier information of the disaster in Cairo is confirmed, Doctor. The person responsible for it I have been unable to trace, for all have left.”

“The absence of any publicity, of any official reaction, is disturbing.”

“But understandable. The President is expected tonight.”

“I am aware of this, and have spread my net; for the hour of danger is earlier. I am staking everything upon my knowledge of the *man*. He never does the obvious.”

“You judge wisely, Doctor. I have information from a reliable source that ‘the obvious’ was proposed, but rejected. What you have foreseen will happen.”

“If I could be as sure of one other thing I would trust to Routine 5 and cancel all other orders.”

“What is this one other thing, Doctor?” The woman’s voice remained soft but revealed tension.

Dr. Fu Manchu clenched his hands; his features became convulsed, and then calm again.

“His being alone at the crucial moment.”

“If I undertake to arrange this one thing, Doctor, will you give me *carte blanche* to deal with it?”

“You never yet failed me, once. And no one ever failed me twice. It is a gambler’s choice—but I have always been a gambler. . . .”

* * *

Brian had great difficulty getting to sleep that night. The astounding experiment in the penthouse had left him in a state of high excitement. He would seriously have doubted the evidence of his senses if the wonders he had seen hadn’t been confirmed by other competent witnesses.

Then, at some remote hour, just as he was dozing off at last, the phone in the living-room buzzed and he heard Nayland Smith’s voice. The conversation was a brief one and a moment later Sir Denis burst in.

“Your father, Merrick! We’re to expect the President at ten o’clock tonight!”

This made sleep a hundred per cent more difficult. He simply could not stop thinking. For some reason which his mental powers were incapable of grasping he had been dragged into the heart of a top secret which might very well involve the survival of civilization.

Why? He kept asking himself—*Why?*

But he could find no answer.

Nature conquered at last, and he forgot his problems. It was after nine o’clock when he woke, and he went into the living-room to see if Nayland Smith was there. He found a note on the desk—which, enclosed in the painted screen, sometimes reminded him of a pulpit—pencilled in block letters (presumably because Sir Denis’s handwriting was illegible).

It said: “Don’t go out until I come back. D.N.S.”

Brian took up the phone and asked to be put through to Lola’s apartment.

She answered at once.

“Listen, Lola honey—did you call me last night? I had to go out.”

“No, Brian. I couldn’t make it.”

“How are you fixed today? I’m uncertain about lunch, but——”

“I’m quite certain about it, Brian. I don’t get any! There’s only one possible spot, maybe an hour, about four o’clock. Will you be free, if I am?”

“I’ll see that I’m free! I’ll wait in the Paris Bar. We can’t miss each other there.”

When presently he hung up, Brian had become uneasily aware of the fact that Lola was preoccupied, tensed up in a new way. He wondered if Madame Michel had been overtaxing her and he wondered, not for the first time, if Lola was changing, slipping away from him . . .

When Nayland Smith came in, around noon, he showed such signs of agitation that Brian felt alarmed. The state of nerves in which Sir Denis had been on his first, clandestine, visit was mild compared to his present condition.

“Sir Denis! Something has upset you. Whatever has happened?”

Nayland Smith turned aside irritably, crossed to the buffet and mixed himself a stiff drink. He dropped down in a chair, took a long draught, and then raised haggard eyes.

“The worst that *could* happen, in the circumstances. Dr. Fu Manchu is here!”

“Here!. You mean in New York?”

“Right here in Manhattan.” He emptied his glass. “In just a few hours the President will leave Washington. I shall find myself up against the master mind—and Fu Manchu will stick at nothing——”

He stood up and refilled his glass.

This was so unlike the abstemious, cool-brained Nayland Smith Brian had known that he was gripped by a swift and dismal foreboding. Sir Denis was *afraidi*

The idea chilled him. It was unthinkable—like something blasphemous. But many incidents passed in lightning parade across his mind, incidents which, individually, had shaken his faith at the time, but which collectively threatened to shatter it.

Suffering had broken this man of iron. It was a tragedy.

“You don’t suggest, Sir Denis, that the President may be in personal danger?”

“Now that Fu Manchu is here we are all in personal danger. Look, Merrick—I’m going up to see Dr. Hessian. It’s vital he should know. Go out and get some lunch. When you come back—and don’t hurry—I may be asleep. I had no sleep last night, so don’t disturb me. . . .”

* * *

Lingering over his lunch, feeling miserable and about as useful as a stray dog, Brian tried to muster his wandering ideas, to form some sort of positive picture.

Fu Manchu was in New York. And Nayland Smith had gone to pieces.

These two facts he must accept, for they stood for cause and effect. For the first he had been prepared; for the second he had not. As aide to Sir Denis (hitherto unemployed), the duty clearly fell upon him of taking over if his chief failed!

The responsibility thrilled, and at the same time chilled. He lacked almost every essential facility. Sir Denis hadn’t troubled to put him in touch with the F.B.I, operatives associated with them. He didn’t know one by sight. He had no more than a nodding acquaintance with Dr. Hessian; and, for all that scientist’s undoubted genius, found his personality strangely repellent.

Brian seriously considered calling his father, laying all the circumstances before that man of wide experience, and abiding by his advice. But the difficulty of doing so on a long-distance call, and an implied betrayal of the trust imposed upon him by Sir Denis, ruled this plan out.

The decision—what to do—rested squarely on himself. It was close on three o’clock when he went up to the suite. He found a “Do Not Disturb” card outside, but opened quietly and went in. A similar card hung on Nayland Smith’s bedroom door. There was a note, in block letters, on the desk. It said:

Do what you like until seven o'clock. But stay out of the Babylon-Lido until that hour. Don't enter on any account. Then wait in the Paris Bar until I page you. Please regard this as an unavoidable order. D.N.S.

Chapter 14

When Brian went into the Paris Bar he found it empty, as he might have expected it to be at that hour. Conscientious by nature, he wasn't sure that his being there didn't amount to disobeying the orders of a senior officer.

He was still studying the problem when Lola came in.

"Lola!" There was no one in the place, not even a bartender, and he took her in his arms. "How very glad I am to see you!"

It was an impulse quite irresistible. He held her close and gave her a lingering kiss. Then he recovered himself as she drew back and looked up at him with that quizzical smile.

"So it seems, dear!" But her grey eyes didn't register resentment; they invited. So did the tempting lips.

Their second kiss was so like one of mutual passion that Brian's heart leapt. Lingering doubts were dispelled. Lola loved him!

"Let's get out of here, dearest." He spoke hoarsely. "I want to talk to you, quietly. Queer things are happening." His arm was around Lola's waist. "Where can we be alone—if only for half an hour?"

"Well!"—Lola hesitated—"I have one of the tiniest apartments in the Babylon-Lido. Madame doesn't squander dollars. We could go there, but —"

She glanced up at him.

"I promise to behave. I admit I'm mad about you, but I won't break out again."

The apartment was on the eighth floor; its windows commanded an excellent view of a brick wall. The living-room wasn't much larger than either of the bathrooms in the lordly suite reserved for Sir Denis. Lola boiled water in an electric kettle to make tea, which she prepared with the manner of an experienced traveller. . . . "You can imagine you're back at Oxford, Brian."

It was all delightfully intimate, and Brian's mood of depression magically dispersed. When, seated in an easy chair nursing a cup of tea, Lola offered him a cigarette, he felt that this was a foretaste of bliss.

He sparked his lighter; glanced at the cigarette—and paused.

"Please light mine," Lola said sweetly. "They arrived this morning—"

enough to last me for two months! Your extravagant tastes need watching, Brian."

The cigarettes were "Azizas"—those he had ordered in Cairo!

"Did you get my letter, Lola?"

"Yes. I got your letter. Thank you for everything, Brian. And now, what is it you want to talk about? I warned you, dear. I hadn't much time. On the stroke of five I have to be off."

"Then I'd better begin. What I want to say is strictly confidential. But I just have to say it to somebody—and there's nobody else but you I can say it to. I'm worried about Sir Denis."

"Why, Brian?" Lola drew her brows together in a frown of concentration. "Is he ill?"

"Yes." Brian nodded, "Mentally ill, I'm afraid. His sufferings have shaken him badly. I think he's losing his nerve."

"From your account of Sir Denis, I supposed he had no nerves."

"So did I. But today he seemed to fold up."

"Why, Brian? Has something happened?"

Brian began to remember that it was his duty to keep his mouth shut. He must put a curb on his confidences. But he believed in Lola's worldly wisdom, and desperately needed her advice.

He glanced at her. It had occurred to him almost from the moment of their meeting that she kept up her usual air of easy self-possession only by means of a sustained effort. Perhaps his passionate greeting had shaken her. But certainly, although she masked the fact, she was queerly keyed up; kept glancing at her watch.

"Sir Denis seems to think some new danger has developed," he told her.

"Danger? To whom?"

"To all of us, I guess." He began to grope for words. "My father's expected tonight, and some other important visitors. If this danger is real, I'm wondering if I should stop them."

"Surely Sir Denis would have done so, if he couldn't guarantee their safety."

"You don't know," Brian assured her, "how completely he's gone to pieces."

"As your father is involved, surely you could at least discuss it with him."

Brian shook his head wearily. "He's asleep up there! And I have his written order. Look at this." From his pocket he took out the note he had found on the desk. "They'll be on their way before seven o'clock!"

Lola read the note, but made no comment; passed it back; glanced at her wrist-watch.

"What would you advise me to do, Lola?"

She stood up. "In the first place, get a move on. I have to go. As for Sir Denis's order, I advise you to do nothing—except obey it to the letter. . . ."

* * *

Brian watched Lola's taxi weaving its way into the traffic torrent and finally becoming lost to view, with a sense of desolation. She had her troubles, too, he knew, although they didn't involve millions of human destinies but only the vanity of a few wealthy women who bought their dresses at Michel's.

He started away at a brisk pace towards Central Park. An hour's walk in fresh air might help him to shake off that appalling sense of gloom, which Huckleberry Finn called then fantods.

From the moment that he entered the Park he hardly noticed where he was going, but evening was drawing in when he found himself passing behind the Museum and pulled up to check the time. He decided to turn back, swung around, and saw that the only other pedestrian in sight, a man walking twenty yards behind him, had done the same.

He thought nothing of this at the moment. Returning along the same path, he saw the man ahead turn to the left for a gate on Fifth Avenue. Brian passed on, nervously considering the night's programme, wondering why the mere approach of Dr. Fu Manchu had so shattered Nayland Smith's courage and what it could be that Sir Denis feared. . . . Did he seriously believe the President's life to be in danger? And did he doubt his own ability to protect him?

Something—perhaps a subconscious urge—prompted Brian to pause and look behind. . . .

The man he supposed to have left the Park was following him again!

Anger came first; then, an unpleasant chill.

His follower might be an agent of Dr. Fu Manchu, or he might be one of the F.B.I. men detailed, according to Sir Denis, to keep him under observation. In any case, it was getting dark, the Park seemed deserted, and Brian went out by the 72nd Street gate and hailed a taxi.

In the main entrance to the Babylon-Lido he looked at his watch.

Twenty minutes to seven.

He turned away and walked around the corner. He had noticed a little bar almost directly facing the trade entrance to the hotel and decided that he could pass the time there over a drink and a smoke. It was better than walking about; he was tired of walking, now, and feeling thirsty.

Taking a corner stool just inside the door, he ordered a drink, lighted a cigarette; settled down to wait for seven o'clock.

For what possible reason had Nayland Smith banished him from the

Babylon-Lido until that hour? It was incomprehensible. Unless, which seemed probable, he was followed by a Federal agent wherever he went, why was Sir Denis's warning "never to go out alone" apparently forgotten?

Either he had become a mere cipher in the game, or Nayland Smith had thrown his hand in and didn't care what happened.

Brian started a fresh cigarette, looked at his watch. Ten minutes to wait.

With some unknown menace, embodied in the name Dr. Fu Manchu, hanging over the party assembling—a party to include the President tonight—this enforced inertia was almost unendurable. Brian found it nearly impossible to remain still. Although he did his best to retain control, he saw the bartender glancing in his direction suspiciously.

Brian stared out of the window—and became very still indeed; so still that he might have been suddenly frozen to his seat. . . .

Lola was standing in the trade entrance to the Babylon-Lido talking to Nayland Smith!

Her face was in shadow, but she was dressed as he had left her at five o'clock. This time there could be no room for doubt. Nor could he be wrong about the man. It was Sir Denis. The coat, the soft-brimmed hat, his poise—all were unmistakable. He saw them go in.

In half a minute he had paid for his drink, and dashed recklessly across the street, ignoring traffic lights.

He had never been in this warren of stores-cellars and kitchens before, but somehow made his way through and at last penetrated to the vast but now familiar lobby. His heart was beating fast; for his world had turned topsy-turvy. What had Lola to do with Nayland Smith? She had told him only that afternoon that she had never met Sir Denis!

The clock over the reception desk recorded five minutes to seven.

People buzzed about in a state of perpetual motion. They all appeared to be in a hurry. Smart women in gay evening gowns who couldn't find their men. Eager-eyed young men rushing around looking for their girl friends. Pages carrying flowers. The scene seemed to swim before Brian like a colour film out of focus. It was a ballet inspired by a mad director.

But the two figures he was looking for were not to be seen.

He debated with himself, looking again at the clock. He could endure this suspense no longer. He must know the truth, orders or no orders. To wait to be paged in his present frame of mind was out of the question. He turned and hurried off to the corridor where the express elevators were situated. The man on duty knew him and smiled a greeting as Brian stepped in.

"Sir Denis has just gone up, sir," he reported.

Brian experienced a fluttering sensation in the pit of his stomach.

“Was he alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

The elevator began its dizzy ascent. Nayland Smith, Brian reflected, must have gone out to meet Lola. They had evidently parted on entering the hotel. But why had they come in by the trade entrance? He could only conclude that the meeting had been a clandestine one.

When he arrived at the top floor he stood for a moment to get a grip on himself.

Then, he walked along to the ‘door of Suite 420B. The “Do Not Disturb” card had gone; and he pulled up, trying further to compose his ruffled nerves.

At last he quietly slipped the key into the lock and opened the door.

Dusk had fallen now and he saw that lights were on in the living-room. There was no sound.

He walked in quietly. . . . Then gulped, and stood quite still.

Flat on his back on the floor, his knees drawn up, his fists clenched, Nayland Smith lay. His face was purple, his teeth were bare, and his eyes bulged from his head. . . .

He had been strangled!

Chapter 15

The horror of his discovery quite literally paralysed Brian. His senses were numbed. He stood speechless, incapable of movement, of thought; aghast.

A slight sound in the room roused him, bringing swift realization of his own danger. He turned to the big desk, for from there the sound had come, and . . . his brain reeled. He was gripped by the agonizing certainty that the murder of Nayland Smith had disturbed his reason—had driven him mad.

Standing beside the tall, painted screen, a finger on his lips, urgent command in his eyes, and beckoning Brian to join him, he saw *Nayland Smith!*

Brian clenched his fists, glancing from the dead man to this phantom of the living.

And the living Sir Denis was beside him in three strides; gripped his arm, speaking softly into his ear:

“Not a word! Behind the screen, Merrick—for your life— and for mine!”

There was nothing ghostly in the grip of those sinewy fingers, nothing

but vital necessity in the whispered orders.

Brian found himself in shadow behind the screen. One spear of light shone through a hole in the parchment, and still half stupefied in this gruesome and almost incredible situation, he saw Nayland Smith jab his thumb through another panel in the screen and make a second hole.

“Look!” came a whisper in his ear. “Do nothing. Say nothing. . . .”

Silence.

Peering through the slot in the parchment, Brian’s gaze automatically became focussed on the dead man. For all that agonized expression, swollen features, protruding eyes, he was prepared to take oath and swear that it was Sir Denis who lay there.

But another Sir Denis—very much alive—stood beside him, and continued to grip his arm!

He felt suddenly sick, wondered if he was going to make a fool of himself—and then noticed something he hadn’t noticed before A door which communicated with the next suite, normally locked, stood partly open. The room beyond was in darkness.

Muttered words—and two men came in!

The first was a thick-set Oriental whose coarse, brutal features and abnormally long arms were simian rather than human. The second Brian recognized; a slender, elegant man wearing a blue turban—in fact the man whom a waiter had reported to be an Indian prince!

They lifted the body and carried it out. The communicating door was closed, and Brian heard the click of a lock.

“Don’t speak!” The words were hissed in his ear. “This room is wired!”

The new Sir Denis crossed to the recently closed door and locked it. He turned and beckoned Brian to follow him. In the lobby: “Say nothing,” he whispered, “but take your cue from me.” Brian nodded. Nayland Smith opened the outer door;

shut it again noisily. “Hullo, Merrick! Before your time.” He spoke, now, in a loud tone. “Anything wrong? You look under the weather. Go and lie down. I’ll bring a drink to your room.”

Brian crossed, rather unsteadily, to his own room and went in. Sir Denis’s extemporized “cue” wasn’t far from the truth. This experience had shaken him severely. Even now he couldn’t get the facts into focus.

Nayland Smith rejoined him, carrying two drinks on a tray. He quietly closed the bedroom door behind him.

“I need one, too, Merrick,” he confessed. “That premature entrance nearly resulted in a second murder—*yours!*”

“But——”

“Wait a minute.” Sir Denis held up his hand. “Let’s get the important thing settled first, because there’s a lot to say and not much time to say it.

You wouldn't be human if you didn't wonder which of us is the real Nayland Smith. I had a fair chance to study my double—and I felt like a man looking in a mirror. Hark back to the time I stayed in Washington. Ask me something about your home life that nobody could know who hadn't lived with you."

Brian tried to force his bewildered brain to think clearly, and presently an idea came.

"Do you remember Father's dog?" he asked.

"Do I remember Rufus!" Nayland Smith smiled—and it was the smile Brian had known, the boyish smile which lifted a curtain of years. "Good reason to remember him, Merrick." He pulled up his left trouser leg. "There's the souvenir Rufus left me when I tried to break up a scrap he was having with a Boston terrier. Rufus thought my interference unsporting! It was you yourself who phoned the doctor, and damn it! He wanted to give me Pasteur injections!"

And, in that moment, all doubt was washed out. Brian knew that this was the real Nayland Smith, that the man he had been employed to work with was an impostor—and a miraculous double!

He held out his hand. "Thank God it's *you* that's alive!"

"I have done so already, Merrick, devoutly. I have passed through the unique experience of witnessing my own execution. I was desperately tempted to rush to the aid of my second self. But to do so could only have meant that the super-criminal, the most dangerous man in the world today, would have slipped again through my fingers. So I clenched my teeth when the thug sprang out on him and said to myself, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Nayland Smith!'"

"Who is—who was—the man impersonating you? It was a star performance. Even the British Embassy in Cairo fell for him! So did my father."

Nayland Smith pulled out the familiar pipe and began to load it.

"So would my own mother, if she had been alive. . . . You're staring at my pipe? Fortunately I had a spare one with me. The poor devil who was strangled probably has the other in his pocket. I don't know who he was, Merrick. But he must have been a talented actor, with a nerve of iron."

"His nerve began to fail."

"I don't wonder. They had news of my escape. There wasn't room in New York for two Nayland Smiths!"

He rapped out the words like so many drum-taps, and at a speed which Brian realized that his impersonator had never acquired.

"He had every intonation of your voice, Sir Denis! All your gestures, every mannerism. Even that trick of twitching at the lobe of your ear! And I believe he smoked more than you do."

Nayland Smith smiled. "Sounds like overacting! Poor devil. He

probably played for big stakes. He had several weeks to study me, Merrick, while I was a prisoner in that damned house in Cairo."

"In Cairo! Then it must have been you, yourself, I saw in a room with barred windows—the house of the Sherif Mohammed!"

Sir Denis stared for a moment, and then: "This is news," he admitted, "but probably right. You can tell me later. We have little time, and you're entitled to know the truth."

He lighted his pipe, stood up and began to walk about.

"I had been on a mission behind the Bamboo Curtain. We had information that Dr. Fu Manchu was operating with the Red Chinese. Knowing the Doctor intimately, I doubted this. He controls a world-wide organization of his own, the Si-Fan. And if anyone succeeds in taking over China it won't be the Communists!"

This was so like what the false Nayland Smith had told him, that Brian listened in growing wonder . . .

"On my way back, by sea (secretly, as I thought) I walked into a trap in Suez which I should have expected an intelligent schoolboy to avoid, and a few hours later found myself a prisoner in the house of the Sherif Mohammed. The Si-Fan had traced me. I was in the hands of Dr. Fu Manchu!"

"How long ago was that?"

"Roughly, two months. I had secured evidence that Fu Manchu had recently been in China, for his chief-of-staff, a brilliant old strategist, General Huan Tsung, was operating under cover right in Peiping. Some highly important scheme was brewing, and I scented that it would be carried out, not in the East, but in the West. I was right!"

"It became clear from the beginning of my imprisonment that Fu Manchu hadn't planned to kill me. For some reason, he wanted me *alive!* My ancient enemy was there in person, in the house of the Sherif Mohammed; and at first I had easy treatment. I was well fed and allowed to exercise in a walled courtyard. But for several hours every day I was brought to a room, two windows of which were barred, as you state, and put through a sort of brain-washing by Dr. Fu Manchu. He spoke to me from behind an iron grille high up in one wall——"

"I have seen it!"

"Remarkable. Details later. He argued on ideological grounds, tried to convert me to the theories of the Si-Fan. Sometimes, he taunted me. He worked over me, Merrick, like a skilled performer playing on a stringed instrument. And not for a long time did the fact dawn that every move I made, every word I spoke, some *other person*, hidden behind the grille, studied, watched, listened to!

"He betrayed himself once only, but from that moment I knew he was always there—and a hazy idea of the plot began to appear. Someone was

being trained to impersonate me! The scheme wasn't a new one. I believe Fu Manchu had had it in mind for several years; probably searched the world for my near-double. I suspect, but may be wrong, that tape recordings of these conversations were made on a hidden microphone, to help my understudy to perfect his impersonation at leisure."

"It beats everything I ever heard! Of course you tried to make a getaway?"

Nayland Smith checked his restless steps and stared grimly at Brian.

"During the day relays of Fu Manchu's professional strangers had me covered. You saw two of them just now. At night there was a hidden microphone in my room. It not only recorded my slightest movements, but could also be used to transmit a note inaudible to human ears. Its production is Fu Manchu's secret, as he was good enough to tell me. Its effect would be to kill me instantly by inducing haemorrhage of the brain!"

"But that's Dr. Hessian's invention!" Brian broke in.

Nayland Smith relighted his pipe. It had gone out while he was talking.

"Unless my deductions are wide of the mark, Merrick, the man you know as Otto Hessian is *Dr. Fu Manchu!*"

A faint buzzing reached them from the living-room.

"That's the penthouse!" Brian spoke breathlessly.

"Then I had better answer."

"But what are you going to do?"

Nayland Smith turned in the act of opening the door. "Whatever the late Nayland Smith the Second was expected to do... ."

* * *

As the door was left open, Brian could overhear Nayland Smith when he spoke on the penthouse line. The conversation was a short one. He came back, his expression grim; reclosed the door.

"Tell me, Merrick—is there anything, any trifle, about my appearance which strikes you as different from—his?"

Brian studied the clean-cut features, thinking hard.

"His skin maybe was artificially sunburned. It didn't look quite natural."

"Nothing to be done about that. What else?"

"Well, something had happened to the bridge of his nose. He wore plaster the first time I saw him. There was no scar, except when he smiled. Then, there was a faint wrinkle where the plaster had been."

"That may explain what was found in a sort of studio in the Sheriff's

house: a wonderful clay model of my head! These people must have got out in a desperate hurry. The studio adjoined a small operating theatre. It seems likely that my double had undergone plastic surgery ... H'm! Avoid smiling!"

"What was the phone message, Sir Denis?"

"In thirty minutes, I'm bidden to a conference with Dr. Fu Manchu, and probably my life hangs on not arousing his suspicion. The odds are in my favour. But my opponent——"

"Where are you to meet?"

"Up in the penthouse."

"You mean Fu Manchu really *lives* there?"

"It's his base of operations. I don't wonder it staggers you. But let me bring you up to date. One day, in Cairo, there was considerable disturbance in the Sherif's household. I sensed that something unusual was going on. Of course, it was the departure of Fu Manchu and most of his unsavoury crew for the United States. Don't ask me how he travels, unless he has a magic carpet, or avoids being identified, because I don't know."

"That time, Sir Denis, if I'm not wrong, he travelled with me (and your double), posing as Dr. Hessian, in a plane provided by the British government!"

Nayland Smith laughed out loud. "You're not wrong, Merrick. Thanks for the information. You see, I know his impersonation of an eccentric German scientist. He has worked it before. He's a master of numberless languages and dialects. To the Western idea, he isn't typically Chinese. He's at least as tall as I am, has fine, ascetic features and a splendid head. His eyes, alone, and his hands, betray the Asiatic."

"But the real Dr. Hessian?"

"If he's alive—which I doubt—Otto Hessian is probably in Siberia. He disappeared behind the Iron Curtain three years ago. Well, as I said, there was a disturbance in the household—and an unpleasant change for me. I was transferred to a room in the cellar. Unmistakably a dungeon, belonging to the days when the old house had been the palace of some wealthy pasha!

"Merrick! I all but lost hope! Two of Fu Manchu's thugs had been left behind to guard me, and I expected from hour to hour they would get word to finish me off! My only exercise was walking about the cellar. And the nights were dreadful. I suspected, but couldn't confirm the suspicion, that some kind of murder machine was installed in my cell.

"Then, one night a queer thing happened. I was roused by a faint noise outside my locked door. I thought my time had come! A light shone through the grille, and I called out, 'Who's there?' The light vanished. Complete silence. Nothing happened . . . until the next day.

“Neither of the assassins brought me my breakfast. There wasn’t a sound to be heard. Hours passed. No one came. I asked myself was I doomed to starve to death! But early next morning a party of Egyptian police, accompanied by Nigel Richardson of the British Embassy, and Lyman Bostock, his American opposite number, burst into the cellar.”

“How had they traced you?” Brian demanded excitedly.

“Top marks to your F.B.I., Merrick. My understudy (then arrived in New York), had excited the suspicion of one of their brightest under-cover agents. A code message reached Bostock. It asked for a secret examination to be made of the house of the Sherif—not neglecting the cellars! A tall order. How the devil they arranged it I don’t know; and they both laughed when I asked them. But I remembered the light through the grille of my cell. Anyway, they succeeded in getting a search warrant. And I can assure you that getting that warrant must have taken a lot of doing! . . . The place was deserted. Not a soul in the building . . . except myself! The Sherif had got wind of the thing and pushed off in a hurry with his entire household, including, I was told, several ladies and a fat eunuch. When I heard of the astonishing deception to which Richardson and Bostock had been made parties I knew that not another hour must be wasted. Both wanted the impostor arrested by the New York police at once. I disagreed.

“I made them see that the arch-conspirator would slip through our fingers. We must find out first the purpose of this amazing plot—which was what the F.B.I. wanted to know, too. Then, we’d have the whole gang in the bag.”

“What I don’t understand,” Brian declared, “is why they left you alive.”

Nayland Smith smiled grimly. “Because somebody blundered—or got cold feet. My cell (as I suspected) was fitted with the brain-blasting equipment, and for purposes of concealing evidence, there was a man-sized bath of curious construction in another room which was intended to contain acid:

something had thrown the gang into a panic, and these little arrangements, by the mercy of Providence, were overlooked at the last moment.”

“Tell me one thing, Sir Denis. By what accident did I get into the picture and why?”

“Not by accident, I assure you! Fu Manchu already had me in his hands, and no doubt his agents were combing likely spots for a young, unemployed American with an influential background, to make doubly sure of my understudy’s acceptance. You were the very man. The F.B.I. had operatives in London (I don’t know why), and they found out that you had been employed by a Communist group, but were ordered not to interfere. Washington had no idea what was brewing, but thought that

you, as an innocent accomplice, might come up later with some useful information.”

“You mean”—Brian flushed indignantly—“that I was allowed to walk blindfolded into this thing?”

“I mean that, yes. And don’t glare at me! *I* had nothing to do with it. What’s more, it’s been done before. You see, Merrick, if you had known, you’d have betrayed yourself. Under-cover espionage isn’t your *metier*. How well it has worked out you can see for yourself. They are quite sure of you, and so we have the game in our hands.”

Brian lighted a cigarette, but said nothing.

“Well,” Nayland Smith went on, “I got my own way and was smuggled out of Cairo. I travelled as Major S. D. Smith, wore a toothbrush moustache and a monocle. Not a word was allowed to leak out about the raid on the Sheriff’s house. All the same, the Si-Fan got the news. When I arrived at Idlewild, at five-thirty this afternoon, I was met by the F.B.I. Their star operative, already a member of the Communist party, had managed, by what I can only call a stroke of genius, to become a top executive of the Si-Fan! Every detail of my projected execution was known!

“First, you had to be kept away until it was all over. Second, as it was assumed that I should apply for a spare key and walk right up to the suite reserved in my name (exactly what I had planned to do), my double had orders to go out.”

“Yes?” Brian was getting excited. “What happened?”

“A tactical move by the F.B.I, worthy of Napoleon. My double’s orders were to slip around to a back entrance, go up in the service elevator and return to the suite. He had to unlock the communicating door and then take cover until I came in and had been liquidated. They managed to detain him long enough for me to come up first, open the door and lie low. When my wretched double appeared he got what was coming to *me!*”

“Do you mean to say the police and the F.B.I.suspected nothing right up to the time you were found in Cairo?”

“They accepted Nayland Smith the Second and Dr. Hessian as authentic. They still think Hessian is. They didn’t know where *you* fitted in. In other words, it was the discovery by their operative in London that you had been employed by a Red agent which sparked the inquiry!” Sir Denis glanced at his watch. “And now I must be off. . . . Don’t look so desperate, Merrick! I’m well briefed, and”—he tapped a coat pocket—“prepared for anything. Stand by. . . .”

Chapter 16

Dr. Fu Manchu sat at the long table in the room without windows when Nayland Smith came in. "Sit down," he ordered. "I have much to say to you."

Nayland Smith sat down in a chair on the other side of the table. He found that whilst Fu Manchu's face remained in shadow, his own was brightly lighted. As of old, he experienced a tingling of the scalp whenever he came into contact with the *force* which seemed to proceed from this evil superman. He recalled the form of address which he had been told to use.

"At your service, Excellency."

Fu Manchu watched him. A stray beam of light touched the green eyes. Their regard was hard to sustain.

"You had done well, William Hailsham," the sibilant voice continued, "until I had to warn you that your prototype had escaped death and was on his way. Your behaviour in face of danger disappointed me. I asked myself if I had rescued a cur from a Soviet labour camp for this!" The strange voice hissed the last word. "Your political views terminated your career as an actor. Your arrogance offended even your Communist employers. I, alone, offered you a way to speedy fortune, security"

Nayland Smith remained silent. Dr. Fu Manchu took a pinch of snuff.

"I am too closely tied to this project. I had hoped to bring with me what you would term a 'stand-in' for Dr. Hessian as you are 'stand-in' for Nayland Smith. Unfortunately, certain surgical treatment proved unsatisfactory at the last moment. Therefore, my personal presence, although necessary, is dangerous."

He closed the lid of the silver snuff-box.

"The first crisis is over. Those responsible shall pay a heavy price. There is only one Nayland Smith—yourself. But, falter tonight . . . and there will be *no* Nayland Smith." He passed his hand over his high brow. "I regret the necessity.

Physically, you might have been twins. But there the likeness ends. Had the real Nayland Smith been not my enemy but my ally, I should sit today on the throne of an empire greater than Rome ever knew. . . . Listen."

And Nayland Smith listened intently.

"The entire routine for tonight is changed. You handled the premature appearance of that impetuous fool, Merrick, very well. You seemed to have recovered your nerve—for you had no more than locked the communicating door when he arrived. I have not lost hope that you may carry off the situation tonight."

Dr. Fu Manchu paused, and his eyes seemed to film over;

but soon he went on:

“The plan of the Reds was to ensure that a certain order to the Chiefs of Staff should not be authorized. This you know. It was a desperate plan, and a bad one. I had never intended to carry it out. This also you know. My own plan would have served the same purpose—but gone further. For, with the acceptance of the so-called ‘Hessian Sound Zone’ I should have had access to every important air base, every military objective, from coast to coast. I should have made them invulnerable!” His voice quivered with the enthusiasm of the fanatic. “Then—at last—I could have challenged the power of Communism . . . and broken it!”

Fu Manchu raised clenched hands above his head, then lowered them; spoke softly.

“These are your new orders. ...”

* * *

Brian paced the living-room like a man possessed.

He had been allowed to become party to a conspiracy directed against the United States government by the very people sworn to defend it; used as a tool! He grew hot with indignation. The mystery which had puzzled him all along was a mystery no more. He had been employed solely as a link with his father, and, through his father, with the President.

But it was the part played by Lola which crowned his misery. Peter Wellingham, he knew now, was a Red agent. Beyond doubt he had been right when he thought it was Lola he had seen with Wellingham in Hyde Park. Lola had drawn his attention to *The Times* advertisement. If any room for doubt had remained, seeing her in the company of the false Nayland Smith would have swept it away. How little either of them could have suspected that their murder plot was known!

Brian groaned in his misery. From first to last he had been in the hands of creatures of Dr. Fu Manchu.

Zoe Montero—Ahmad—all had played him like a hooked fish!

He remembered, bitterly, Lola saying about *The Times* advertisement, “It read like a job created purposely for you.” It *had* been created purposely for him, and she knew it!

Fu Manchu or the Reds, whichever of them she worked for, had sent her off to New York to take him over as soon as he arrived. They were naturally anxious to know if he suspected anything. Many other questions about Nayland Smith recurred to him, and he could see their purpose, now. . . . Perhaps little Zoe—alone—had really weakened and tried to help him.

He would have loved to think so.

But Lola . . .

This mood of self-contempt so burned him up that he wanted to curse aloud. It called for a mighty effort to put his own petty troubles aside, to get back to the concrete inescapable fact that he was still involved in a giant conspiracy which might change world history.

He looked at the time. Surely Sir Denis should be back?

And, as he arrived at this conclusion, Sir Denis did come back. He entered quietly, put one finger to his lips, and pointed to the open door of Brian's room.

They went in, and Nayland Smith closed the door.

"Lucky I was warned that our living-room is wired," he remarked. "Well—I think I have passed, Merrick. At least, I'm still alive! But those X-ray eyes may have seen more than Fu Manchu thought it diplomatic to give away. He was employed by the Reds—rather reluctantly, I gather—to carry out a certain scheme."

"He—your double—told me the same thing! That Fu Manchu had been employed to prevent Dr. Hessian's invention falling into the hands of the United States!"

"That was the story my double sold to the authorities. Remember, he was accepted for myself. Hessian wasn't doubted. The only dark horse in the stable was *you!* The F.B.I. rarely let you out of their sight!"

"You mean they suspected me of being a Red spy?" Brian blazed angrily.

"They didn't know what or whom to suspect, Merrick, until I came on the scene. By the way, they'll be expecting me to report. But I'm in rather a quandary."

"If Fu Manchu already knows the secret of this sound cover, what on earth is he doing here?"

Nayland Smith laughed dryly. "What Fu Manchu, himself, described to me as the 'so-called Hessian Sound Zone' he really meant to place in the hands of the United States! He had no intention of following his Red instructions. These were designed simply to prevent the President signing an order to Chiefs of Staff which would have upset certain of their plans. It involved an urgent telephone call from the White House, a mouthpiece which ejected an odourless gas, and some other details which Fu Manchu could undoubtedly have provided."

"But why such an elaborate set-up?"

Nayland Smith began to fill his pipe, glancing aside at Merrick.

"Have you ever thought how hard it would be to get the President of the United States *alone?* Had the Red plan been carried out, he would have been struck down by what any physician would have diagnosed as a heart attack, and been incapable of transacting any business for a long time!"

“Good God! What a villainous plot!”

“But child’s play for Dr. Fu Manchu. That’s why he was employed.”

“Then the Hessian Sound Zone is just an illusion—a hoax?”

Nayland Smith dropped his pouch back into his pocket; struck a wooden match.

“Not a bit of it. The Sound Zone is Dr. Fu Manchu’s invention. He’s a scientific genius. The thing is an astounding reality!”

“Astounding’s an understatement.”

“It would give complete immunity from blast. No projectile could penetrate it. The nuclear fall-out would be dispersed over a wide area of the upper atmosphere. This, if such horrible weapons are ever used, is unavoidable. The consequences would depend upon the direction of the wind over which no man, not even Dr. Fu Manchu, has control.”

“Then why not let bygones be bygones, if Fu Manchu has really come clean?”

“Because, to mention one reason, its adoption, whilst making America, and I suppose the other Western allies, immune to direct air attack, would also give the Si-Fan absolute control of the Near and Far East.”

“But if it’s real——”

“Just so, Merrick.” Sir Denis lighted his pipe. “That’s why we have to hold the candle to the devil. That’s why we can’t arrest the two assassins next door, and produce the body which, I suppose, is hidden there. That’s why I don’t know what to report.”

Brian was dumbfounded. “You mean that, after what happened tonight, Fu Manchu will still go ahead with his project?”

Nayland Smith nodded; dropped the match-end in a tray.

“It’s his master-plot. He won’t resign it easily.”

The smell of tobacco-smoke spurred Brian to light a cigarette; to put himself in the background; concentrate on these vast issues at stake.

“This master-plot may be clear to you, Sir Denis, but I can’t get it. Why would the fact (and I accept your word it *is* a fact), that the West was safe from air attack, help this amazing man to take over the East?”

“Because the Reds, helpless to retaliate, could be blasted into submission, or unconditional surrender. And the vast underground movement throughout the East, which he has developed, would seize power. There’d be no holding him! I assure you, Merrick, that Hitler and Stalin were babes and sucklings compared to Dr. Fu Manchu!”

Nayland Smith continued his usual promenade. Brian was deep in thought.

“His cutting-in with a double for yourself,” he admitted, “wasn’t far short of criminal genius. His preparations to handle the thing if you happened to be alive were masterly.”

“Dragging the son of a prominent Senator and friend of the President

into his programme also had elements of talent,” Sir Denis remarked dryly. “Never underestimate Dr. Fu Manchu. If he hadn’t been bitten by the bug called Power he would be honoured today as one of the world’s greatest intellects. Fortunately (in this case) like many men of genius, he’s more than slightly mad.”

“But what are you going to do?” Brian demanded. “The F.B.I, know, now, that Dr. Hessian isn’t the real man——”

“They don’t!” Nayland Smith rapped. “I haven’t told them. They accepted my double and Hessian as authentic. They began to worry about Nayland Smith the Second. Thought I had been brain-washed or something; but, all through, never doubted Hessian. They know now that my understudy wasn’t Nayland Smith; but they believe that Hessian is Hessian and that the purpose of the plot is to steal his invention.”

“Then why keep them in the dark?”

“Because, as he believes that I am his own man (I hope), Fu Manchu still plans to meet the President tonight and to hand over his system to the United States! The late Nayland Smith the Second was an actor called William Hailsham, an active member of the Communist Party. My orders are to tell the committee that the impostor attempted to kill me and that in self-defence I strangled him!”

“But are you really going to do it?”

Nayland Smith twitched the lobe of his ear. “I don’t know. I’m thinking hard. . . .”

* * *

This remarkable conversation was still going on in Brian’s room in Suite 420B when a tall, spare figure wearing a long black coat and a wide-brimmed black hat rapped in a peculiar manner on the door of Suite 420C.

The door was opened immediately by the slender man who wore a blue turban.

He salaamed deeply. “Master!”

Dr. Fu Manchu walked in with his majestic yet curiously feline step, and in the main room, which, although richly furnished, was smaller than that in the adjoining suite, faced the second occupier—whose apelike ugliness had so appalled Brian when he had seen him through a hole in the screen.

He, too, saluted the doctor as one doing reverence to a pagan god.

“Everything found in his possession,” Fu Manchu demanded, speaking Hindustani. “Quickly. Show me.”

The thickset man ran to an open suit-case, took out a parcel and

spread all it contained on a table. "Here is everything, Master."

Fu Manchu examined the exhibits found on the person of the dead man, one by one. A silver disk stamped with a number and a curious design seemed to excite him strangely. His eyes, when he raised them, gleamed with a light of madness.

He turned, pointed to an outsize wardrobe trunk standing against the wall. On it was painted "Prince Ranji Bhutan!"

"Unlock it!" he commanded.

His voice, which ranged at times from the guttural to a sort of menacing hiss, was no more than audible.

The younger man, his handsome but sinister features registering intense alarm, produced a bunch of keys and, not without difficulty, unlocked the big trunk.

Upright inside, and secured with leather straps, the double of Nayland Smith stood, his head drooping so that the swollen features were in shadow. Dr. Hu Manchu stepped forward and tilted the head upward—no easy matter, for the neck muscles were already stiff.

From a pocket of his black coat he took out a lens and, peering closely, examined the nose of the victim.

He replaced the lens, turned, and struck the long-armed thug a flat-handed blow across his face. The younger killer fell to his knees, clasping his hands.

"Master!"

"Fools!" Fu Manchu's features were contorted; his expression was that of a dangerous maniac. "You have killed the wrong man!" . . . By a stupendous effort of will, he recovered his usual calm. "Relock the trunk. Remain here until further orders reach you."

With his silent, catlike walk, Dr. Fu Manchu turned away, opened the door, and went out. He passed the suite occupied by Nayland Smith, and went up to the penthouse. In the dark room which adjoined that equipped for the demonstration he seated himself at the radio switchboard and made an adjustment.

A point of blue light appeared. A woman spoke. "Yes, Doctor?"

"Tonight's plans changed. Report to me—immediately. . . ."

At about this time, Brian, chain-smoking in his agitation, was watching Nayland Smith pacing the floor of the room like an English Guardsman on sentry duty. At last, Sir Denis broke his long silence.

"I have chosen my course, Merrick. Heaven grant it's the right one. Bearing in mind what I mean to do tonight—*must* do—I doubt if Fu Manchu's secret device would be handed over. He has the cunning of the serpent. He takes fantastic risks; but always assures himself of a way out. My explanation to the committee, which I am supposed to give verbatim (the deceased actor was evidently a quick study), would certainly break up

the conference.”

“Sure! Just what I was thinking! The meeting tonight——”

“I can’t believe that a man so astute as Dr. Fu Manchu ever intended it to take place. He has changed his plans. He may be laying another trap—he may be preparing to make a getaway! This could only mean that the cunning devil recognized me!”

“Then why didn’t he bump you off when he had you up there in the penthouse?”

“Think again, Merrick,” Sir Denis rapped. “Consider *two* dead Nayland Smiths on his hands in the Babylon-Lido! No. There hasn’t been time to move the other one. We may lose the secret of the Sound Zone, but, at last, we have Dr. Fu Manchu!”

“What are we going to do?”

Nayland Smith knocked ash from the hot bowl of his pipe.

“I can’t stop the others. That doesn’t matter. But I shall signal the plane bringing your father and the President, and their course will be changed. We don’t know what new devilry may be brewing, and I daren’t risk it. Our best defence is attack.”

He headed for the door.

“What’s my job?” Brian wanted to know.

“We’ll slip down and talk to Ray Harkness. He’s in charge of the F.B.I., engaged on this job. We have worked together before. This double business has shaken him badly. Before I went up tonight we arranged a password—in case the wrong man had survived!”

Chapter 17

Brian saw a smallish, dapper man who might have been an accountant or a bank manager, but couldn’t possibly be a detective, except that it happened he was.

He jumped up as they came in.

“Bamboo!” Nayland Smith greeted (presumably the arranged password). “Virtue triumphed for once in a while, Harkness!”

Raymond Harkness sat down again. “Thank God I see you alive! It was a crazy, and, in my opinion, an unnecessary risk.”

Nayland Smith rested his head on Harkness’s shoulder.

“Your staff work was excellent. Merrick, here, threatened to disturb the plan at a critical moment. But our luck held, and I held on to Merrick. By the way, you haven’t met.”

“No.” Harkness shook hands with Brian, smiling. “But we have wasted

a lot of time covering you, Mr. Merrick! For heaven's sake what happened? Where's . . . the other one? We knew all the details of the trap, but not what it was planned to do when you walked into it."

"An expert job of strangling! He never uttered a sound."

"Good God! They have murdered their own man?" Sir Denis nodded. "What have they done with his body?"

"Still in the room next to ours, I suppose. But if we're to get the whole gang in the bag I want quick action. You have the list of tenants occupying apartments on our floor?"

Harkness held up a typed sheet. "It's been impossible, at short notice, to check all of them. But speaking of the room next to yours——"

"No time, now. Look—I'll tell you what we must do. Hold the elevators on this floor. Instruct operators to tell upcoming passengers to use stairs. There are two elevators but only one stair. Post a good man at the foot of the stair. Order him to direct such passengers to this room. Keep your door open. Tell 'em what you like, but hold 'em."

Harkness raised his eyebrows, but took up the phone and gave these unwelcome instructions to the hotel office, adding, "To go into force as from now." He hung up, glanced at Nayland Smith. "Well—what about anyone coming *down*?"

"They must be told to go up again until further notified. Police Department orders. An experienced patrolman in uniform best for stair job."

Harkness nodded and spoke again on the phone. Then:

"You're in charge tonight, Sir Denis," he acknowledged, "but we've worked together before and I like to know what to expect. Do you think it's a plot against the President?"

"Not against his life, Harkness," Nayland Smith rapped. "At least, I don't think so. But in any event he won't be here. I gave orders a few minutes ago to have his course diverted."

Raymond Harkness watched Sir Denis with steady eyes.

"Then you believe Fu Manchu is still in Manhattan?"

"I know it."

"Where?"

"In the penthouse!"

"What!" Harkness sprang up. "Then he's holding Dr. Hessian! He's in our hands! What are we waiting for?"

"Go easy!" Nayland Smith smiled his grim smile. "And don't worry about Dr. Hessian. *I'm* looking after him!"

Harkness sat down again. "You know, now that I hear you, and see you, I wonder I ever fell for your double! But at the time I was completely sold."

"So was everybody else. Who but Dr. Fu Manchu could have pulled

off such a thing?”

There was a rap on the room door, and a smart-looking police sergeant came in and saluted. Harkness looked up.

“Ah! It’s Sergeant Ruppert. I knew you were detailed for duty here tonight. I want you to mount guard at the foot of the stair to the floor above. Stand on the other side of the door. No need to alarm residents on this floor. Anyone wanting to go up to be directed to this apartment. Make sure they come here, but don’t lose sight of the staircase exit. Anyone coming down to be sent back—*anyone*. All clear?”

“All ready, sir. But what about the elevators?”

“They’ve been stopped from this floor upward.” Harkness glanced at Nayland Smith. “Anything else?”

“One thing,” Sir Denis rapped. “Jump to it, Sergeant! Every minute counts!” Sergeant Ruppert saluted and ran out. “Any news from Number One, Harkness?”

Raymond Harkness shook his head. “No. Can’t figure it out. She expected to have something to report on the latest move. It could be useful. But not a word. And I can’t locate her. I hope——”

“So do I.” There was a deep sincerity in Nayland Smith’s voice. “She takes risks few men would take—and Fu Manchu is merciless”

* * *

“How many have you on duty tonight, Harkness?” Nayland Smith asked. “Without Merrick and myself?”

“Eleven. Four F.B.I.s and, on the present occasion, nine police. Four in uniform, including the sergeant, and five plain-clothes men. If I can count Number One, twelve.”

“Assemble them all here. There are seven apartments upstairs, including mine. I want them all searched. You have keys from the management?”

“Here.”

“I’ll take the key of the stair door to the penthouse and the key of the inside door.”

Harkness passed over three keys. “There are two doors to the penthouse,” he explained. “The second I believe opens into a kitchen.”

“And now, can you lend Merrick a gun?”

“Sure.” Harkness pulled a drawer open and took out a regulation police revolver. “It isn’t easy to carry, Mr. Merrick, but it’s practical.”

“Thanks.”

Brian put the heavy weapon in a coat pocket. He didn’t know what was going to happen, but the more exciting it turned out to be the better he

would like it. He needed an antidote to his mood of angry self-contempt.

“Let the whole party stand by, Harkness,” Sir Denis went on in his quick-fire way, “until I give the word. Merrick and I are going to do a spot of reconnaissance. If a trap is being laid we don’t want to walk into it.”

They met no one in the long corridor as they headed towards the elevators. The door to the stair, with a red light above it, was in a side passage a few paces beyond. It was that hour which comes in every big hotel when nearly all the guests are out for the evening.

Suddenly, Nayland Smith said something which brought Brian to a stop as though he had hit a wall.

“I pray no harm has come to Lola Erskine,” he rapped.

Brian made a gasping sound; stood stock still. Sir Denis paused, looked back, and then stared, amazed, at the suddenly pale face he saw behind him.

“Merrick! What’s wrong? Are you ill?”

Brian tried hard to recover poise. It wasn’t easy.

“I’m sorry—behaving like a fool. But you *did* say Lola Erskine?”

“I did. What about it?”

“Is she the woman you called Number One, who was expected to report to Mr. Harkness?”

“She is.” Nayland Smith stared hard. “She’s the star operative I mentioned to you, who had worked her way into the Reds’ confidence, and from there (an even more astonishing undercover feat) into the Secret Order of the Si-Fan. Have you met her?”

“Yes.” Brian spoke hoarsely, but had himself in hand again. “In London.”

“In London? Then it was she who sent the information that you had been employed by Red agents. Wonderful girl! She was the first person to suspect my double. You see, Merrick she was working close to Dr. Fu Manchu! Just think of that! A mere girl—and a very pretty one; she met me at Idlewild—getting away with such a thing!”

“I *am* thinking, Sir Denis, and I’m frightened stiff. Because, you see, I’m very fond of Lola.”

Nayland Smith smiled—the smile Brian remembered.

“Ho, ho! That’s how the wind blows! I’m frightened, too. First, I owe my freedom to her. She was responsible for the search of the house in Cairo. Second, I owe her my life. She learned all about the trap set for me here, briefing me (I knew all the routine), and was instrumental in getting my double’s instructions mixed up.”

Brian clenched his fists. “If Dr. Fu Manchu knows the truth. Sir Denis, he must know——”

“That Lola Erskine has double-crossed him? .. That’s why I’m frightened.”

They had been standing still in the long passage, talking in hushed voices; and now:

“Come on!” Nayland Smith rapped. “We must act.”

He set off at a run. As they passed the elevators and turned into the passage where a red light shone above the stair door, Brian found himself wondering if a girl like Lola could possibly give a damn for such a despicable, distrustful creature as himself. . . .

Nayland Smith pulled the heavy door open.

“Hullo! What’s this?”

There was no one there!

“Where’s Sergeant Ruppert?” Brian cried out.

Sir Denis raised his hand. “Ssh! We don’t know who may be listening. But I don’t like it. Come on—and be ready for anything.”

He started up the stair, walking softly, one hand in a pocket of his tweed jacket. At the top he peered out cautiously along the corridor. It was empty from end to end. He banged his fist into the palm of his left hand.

“I should have known better than to rely on one man in dealing with Fu Manchu!”

“What do you figure happened? He didn’t call out. We’d have heard him!”

“*When* it happened is what worries me. How long has this stair been open? Stand by, Merrick. Have your gun handy. If anyone comes near you, cover him and make him stand still, hands up, until I return.”

And Nayland Smith darted back down the stairs. . .

“When it had happened” was fully twenty minutes earlier. Apartment 421 was across the passage and not far from Nayland Smith’s suite. A smartly-dressed woman, her beauty hall-marked with the stamp of sophistication which some men (particularly young ones) find irresistible, had just come in. She had not long returned from Idlewild where Dr. Fu Manchu had ordered her to go to report the instant of Sir Denis’s arrival. She had means of learning such things, for beauty is a key which opens many doors.

Wearily she tossed an expensive hat on to the bed and sat down in front of her mirror. She opened a cream leather jewel case, unstrapped a conspicuous, diamond-studded wrist-watch and was about to put it away when a voice spoke— apparently coming from the watch.

“Where are you now?”

She started, stooped forward, and answered, “Back in my room, Doctor.”

“No one obstructed you?”

“No one.”

“You have done well. You were only just in time. But there is more to

do. Put the amethyst ring on your finger. It is live. Be careful not to turn the bezel until needed. Remember the volume is low. Direct contact is necessary. Wear the diamond watch also. You understand?"

"I understand."

"Your freedom is in your hands tonight."

The woman's eyes opened widely. They were of the colour of the ring which Dr. Fu Manchu had ordered her to wear— amethyst—and, with her auburn hair, gave her an exotic beauty. Her delicate colour paled as she spoke:

"You mean—my complete freedom?"

"Your absolute freedom. The task I am giving you shall be your last. So you cannot afford to fail. These are your orders. . . ."

As an immediate result of those orders, Sergeant Mike Ruppert, taking up his station at the foot of the stairs, a post which he expected to find very dull, had just ventured to start a cigarette when he heard light footsteps descending.

He dropped the cigarette and put his foot on it, turned—and saw a vision.

A disturbingly attractive woman was coming down. From her slender foot, her arched instep, to the flaming crown of her wonderful hair, Sergeant Ruppert found no flaw in her beauty. He began to rack his memory, convinced that she must be a film star. For he suffered from a fixed idea that Hollywood had a corner in such feminine perfection.

She smiled alluringly, and made to pass him.

Sergeant Ruppert intruded his bulk. "Sorry, lady. No one allowed down this way."

"What do you mean, Sergeant?" She had an enchanting accent. "I live here. You can't keep a guest a prisoner!"

The sergeant wasn't enjoying his job. "Department orders, miss. There's—er—some inquiry going on. It'll be all clear soon."

"Soon! But my friend is waiting."

"He'll wait!" Sergeant Ruppert grinned.

A ghost of the smile stole back to the lovely face.

"He is a *she*, my sergeant! But please let me go. It is bad enough that the elevators are out of order, that I have to walk up and down. But this!"

"That's right." The sergeant was sympathetic. "But it's not my fault, miss. All I can do is obey orders,"

"It is so stupid!" she pouted. "Never again do I stay at the Babylon-Lido! I shall go up and call the manager. Come with me. You shall hear that I am to be allowed to go out."

"Sorry, miss. I'd like nothing better——"

"I can give you a nice cool drink while I phone."

Sergeant Ruppert had never heard of St. Anthony, but he was going

through similar fires. Years of discipline won. Dizzy but unconquered:

"I can't leave my post, miss," he told her.

"*Ah, parbleu!*" she sighed. ("French," the sergeant decided!) "So I am imprisoned—yes?"

"It's not as bad as that, lady. I'll tell you what you do. I don't think it's meant for a young lady like you to be inconvenienced. So go back to your apartment and call the manager like you said. Ask him to speak to the officer in charge, and——"

She turned away impulsively. "It is preposterous! All this trouble! . . . Ah! *mon Dieu!*" She stumbled, turned back, clutched Sergeant Ruppert. "I twist my ankle!"

Her slender hands—he noted a great violet ring (the colour of her eyes!) on one white finger—slipped around his neck. Her touch made him tremble. And this moment of emotion was the last thing he remembered. . . . She had turned the bezel.

He experienced a sensation as though he had been clubbed on the back of his head—and knew no more.

She had carried out her last task—for she couldn't afford to fail. In a fractional moment she reversed the bezel—a miniature receiver, tuned to pick up the lethal note from the transmitter in the penthouse. But as the big, good-looking policeman pitched forward and fell on his face, tears dimmed her eyes. She raised the jewelled wrist-watch. Her hands trembled when she adjusted the cunning radio mechanism.

"It is done!" she whispered.

"Good. Do not return to your apartment. Whatever you leave behind there shall be recovered or replaced. Walk down one more floor. Then use the elevator. You have money with you?"

"As you ordered, Doctor."

"Avoid observation going out. Use a side entrance. Take a taxi to East 74th Street at Park Avenue. A man will be standing outside the drug store on the corner. He will wear evening dress and a red rose in his buttonhole. Say 'Si-Fan' and he will make all arrangements. Your life is your own. . . ."

Chapter 18

Brian's vigil at the stair-head proved something of a tax on his nerves.

If the strange and oddly sinister figure who had dominated the meeting in the penthouse was none other than Dr. Fu Manchu then his uneasy feeling in the presence of the man he had accepted as Otto Hessian called for no further explanation. During the journey from Egypt he had

had a strong inclination to avoid him, and, as he now recalled clearly, the bogus Nayland Smith had encouraged him to do so, saying, "He has the brains of a genius but the manners of a gorilla. . . ."

And now, the fabulous Dr. Fu Manchu was near, on the defensive, at bay!

Already he had spirited away a physically powerful police officer, armed and keenly alert to danger. . . .

In the long, lighted corridor there was unbroken silence. Guests occupying the several apartments were probably away for the evening, he assumed—unless (a disturbing thought) there were other apartments as well as that adjoining their own which harboured servants of the Chinese doctor. He saw again, mentally, the two Asiatic assassins dragging away the body of the unfortunate double.

Perhaps they had strangled Sergeant Ruppert!

He changed his position slightly, so that he had his back to a wall; tried to blot out a ghastly memory of the dead man's face, and to call up the image of Lola.

What had happened to her? He seemed to have lived through another life since that wonderful hour in her room. In fact, during this one day he had experienced every emotion of which humanity is capable. Love, when he held Lola in his arms; horror, and a great fear, when he saw Nayland Smith lying dead on the floor. And fear had come again—fear that he was insane—when *another* Nayland Smith had appeared.

The belief, the conviction, that Lola was nothing more than a decoy of Dr. Fu Manchu's had brought a sorrow such as he had never known. . . . And now when he knew the truth—she had gone!

A faint sound broke the silence of the corridor.

Brian stood, tense, almost holding his breath, listening.

The sound came from the stair.

He pulled out the big revolver, readied it for action, and slightly turned his head, looking down. Soft footsteps were mounting the stair. He raised the barrel, sighting it on the bend at which the person coming up would appear.

No one appeared. But a snappy voice came:

"Don't shoot, Merrick!"

It was Nayland Smith. A moment later he stood beside Brian. "Phew!" Brian felt hot all over. "Glad you spoke!"

"So I see," Sir Denis commented dryly. "But don't relax your vigilance. We have the situation in hand, if——"

"If what?"

"If we're not too late." Nayland Smith spoke in a low tone. "First, we go to our own apartment. Don't open your mouth while I try to call the penthouse. Remember, the room has been wired."

Brian nodded, and they walked along to 420B. Nayland Smith unlocked the door, stood for a moment listening, and then went in. He crossed straight to the penthouse phone, lifted the receiver, held it to his ear awhile and then put it back. He frowned grimly; beckoned Brian to follow and went out of the apartment.

“Step as nearly like a cat as you can,” he whispered. “I’m going up to listen at the door. If I hear anything we won’t go in alone. We’ll wait for reinforcements.”

Fighting down a growing excitement (for Lola might be a prisoner there!), Brian watched while Sir Denis quietly unlocked the door to the penthouse stair.

They stole up.

The stair opened on a landing, and the door was nearly opposite, as Brian remembered. To their right was the elevator which normally served the penthouse, and beyond, a second door.

Nayland Smith tiptoed forward, apparently with the intention of pressing his hear to a panel—then paused. Closer contact was unnecessary.

A voice was speaking, muffled by the intervening door, but still audible—a strident, sibilant voice: “Do you imagine,” it said scornfully, “that your puny interference can check the wheels of the Inevitable? The dusk of the West has fallen. The dawn of the East has come. . . .”

Nayland Smith turned, a triumphant grin on his lean face; pointed to the stair. Brian followed him down. Sir Denis partly closed the door below.

“You heard him, Merrick—you heard him?” he whispered. “One of his favourite slogans. How often have I listened to it! That’s *Dr. Fu Manchu!*”

Brian’s heart jumped uncomfortably.

“Who is he talking to?”

“I fear—to Lola Erskine. . . .”

* * *

Brian went through hours of torture in the few minutes that it took to muster the party. Harkness had a search-warrant, and two of the plain-clothes men came from Homicide;

for there was evidence to show that a murder had been committed on the top floor of the towering wing of the Babylon-Lido.

When duties had been allotted, Harkness and another F.B.I. man joined Brian and Nayland Smith, and all four went up to the penthouse. Harkness and his assistant—his name was Dakin—were to deal with the kitchen entrance; Brian and Sir Denis concentrated on the other door.

They stood for a moment, listening.

Complete silence.

“Get the door open!” Brian gasped, quivering with suspense. “For God’s sake, open it!”

Nayland Smith, very grim-faced, put the key in the lock— but never turned it.

“No, no!” A stifled scream came from inside. “Don’t open that door! It’s the end of all of us if you do! Break in at the other end. But don’t open that door!”

Lola!

Sir Denis grasped Brian’s arm in a grip that hurt. He withdrew the key.

“I don’t know what this means, Merrick, but we must do as she directs. Come on!” They ran to join Harkness. “In through the kitchen!”

Harkness unlocked the door. The door swung open.

Brian tried to hurl himself in. Nayland smith grabbed him.

“Go easy, Merrick! We can’t be sure. This is *my* pidgin.”

An automatic in his hand, Sir Denis stepped warily into a well-equipped kitchenette. Brian followed. There were traces of that peculiar chemical smell which he had noted before, on the night of the demonstration.

They pushed on into what was evidently a dining-room. But it didn’t appear to have been used for one. The only window was blacked out with heavy velvet drapes. On the buffet odd pieces of chemical apparatus stood, as well as a number of bottles and phials. There was very little furniture except a narrow table covered with green baize and a large chair. A green-shaded lamp stood on the table—the only light in the room.

Near the lamp was a cabinet the front of which consisted of a small switchboard.

“Some kind of radio control,” Nayland Smith commented.

“In here! Oh! Be quick!”

Brian, at that wild appeal, pushed past Sir Denis and burst in ahead of everybody.

He stopped so suddenly that he was nearly floored by the rush from behind.

The room in which he had witnessed the extraordinary experiment carried out by the man calling himself Dr. Hessian seemed to swim before his eye. A plan of Manhattan still covered the whole of the top of the long table; but the rows of chairs had been removed. The metal containers which had hung from the ceiling were there no longer. The radio set which produced the “inaudible note” remained in its place on a bureau. A small box, which might have been the one used at the demonstration to represent a specially-equipped plane, stood on one end of the table.

Near by, in a heavy armchair, Lola was seated, white and wild-eyed.

Her ankles were lashed to the front legs. Both wrists had been tied to the arms of the chair, but she had managed to free her right hand and to tear off the adhesive tape strapped to her mouth.

It had been done in frantic haste, for her lip was red and swollen.

Brian sprang to her side and began to unfasten her other wrist, but: "Smash that thing!" she said, in a shrill, unnatural voice, pointing to the little box. "The *Sound* comes from there! Smash it!"

Brian stood upright, and ignoring Nayland Smith who had a hand on his shoulder, pulled out the police revolver and fired two shots into the flimsy framework.

There came a loud explosion, a crash of glass, splinters flew, and one bullet rebounded to be buried in the wall beyond. Then—the box burst into flames!

Dakin acted promptly. Dashing out to the kitchen, he was back in quick time carrying a big pitcher of water. With this, he dowsed the flaming fragments on the table.

When Brian turned—Lola had fainted. . . .

* * *

Brian carried Lola downstairs, using the kitchen entrance. Dakin came with him to unlock the door of the suite. All the other doors along the corridor were wide open, and sounds indicated that the search-parties were at work—apparently without success. As Brian laid Lola on the big couch:

"She'll soon pull out of it," Dakin assured him. "Number One has the heart of a lion. If you have any brandy, I think"—he smiled—"I can leave the patient in your hands. I'll leave the key, too."

Dakin retired, closing the outer door. Brian ran to the buffet and was looking for the brandy when he heard Lola's voice:

"I don't think I ever fainted in my life before——"

He turned, ran to her. She was sitting up.

"Lola, my dearest!"

"But I do believe a small glass of brandy would do me good!"

Brian ran back, found the brandy, and poured out a liberal shot.

He knelt beside her, his arm around her shoulders as she took the glass. Lola smiled, that fascinating, mocking smile.

"If I drank all this, Brian, I should faint a second time!"

She took a sip of the brandy, and he drew her to him.

"Lola!" he whispered.

"My lips are sticky from that beastly tape," she protested.

Brian held her very close, but kissed her gently.

"I nearly went crazy when I heard you were missing."

Lola took another sip and then set the glass down. "So you have found me out." She spoke softly. "You know what a little liar I am!"

"I know you have more grit in your little finger than I have in all my hulking carcass!"

"You mean you forgive me for what I had to do?"

"Forgive you!" She raised her hand; checked him.

"Brian, dear, go back now, and let me lie here for five minutes. I shall be quite all right, when I have rested—and cleaned the gum off my face! Then I'll join you."

"Leave you here alone! And Fu Manchu——"

"Fu Manchu is too far away to harm me."

"But we heard his voice!"

"I know you did. He intended you to hear it. But he isn't there! Go up and see for yourself. I'll be with you in a few minutes. ..."

And when Brian, torn between his desire to stay with Lola and a burning curiosity, returned to the penthouse, he found the proper entrance door open. Harkness was bending over the cabinet which looked like a radio set, the back of which had been removed. Nayland Smith was pacing the room and twitching the lobe of his ear.

"How is she?" he rapped.

"Fine. She's coming up after a little rest. But where's ... Dr. Fu Manchu?"

Sir Denis pointed to an open drawer of the bureau.

"There—all we have of him! A tape-recorder playing back our conversations in Cairo! If you and I had listened a while longer we should have heard my voice as well! Brought over for the benefit of my successor. The machine had played right through the records. The cunning devil!"

Brian stared about the room incredulously, still half expecting to see the dark spectacles of Dr. Hessian (the only picture he had of the dreaded Fu Manchu) peering out from some shadowy corner.

"But the door! What was the danger of opening the door?"

"The danger's on the table there," Harkness called out. "Three ordinary bell-pushes which were under the carpet where anybody coming in couldn't miss stepping on one of them!"

"Wired to the receiver you shot to pieces!" Sir Denis added grimly. "If Lola hadn't lost her head (although God knows I don't blame her) we might have disconnected them, and so had the secret of the Sound Zone in our hands!"

"Then the other thing"—Brian nodded towards the cabinet—"was connected all the time?"

"It was. One step, and Lola, as well as everyone else and everything breakable in the penthouse, would have gone West! Which reminds me of

something you may be able to tell me. ... The french windows. You saw the demonstration. Why weren't the windows blown out?"

Brian thought hard; tried to picture this room as he had seen it then—and a memory came.

"I think I can tell you. I remember now that just before Dr. Hessian began to talk, the Japanese lowered what looked like metal shutters over the windows, and then drew those drapes over them."

"Shutters still there," Sir Denis told him. "Couldn't make out if they were a hotel fixture. Now I know, they should be examined. Evidently made of some material non-conductive of the fatal sound."

Harkness stood up from his examination of the cabinet, and lighted a cigarette.

"Fu Manchu planned to leave no evidence, Mr. Merrick," he remarked. "We found a small, but I guess effective, time-bomb inside this thing! Dakin worked with a bomb-disposal squad in England in the war. He's an expert. He's out in the kitchen fixing it."

"You see, Merrick?" Nayland Smith rapped. "I'm naturally proud of Scotland Yard, but your F.B.I, isn't without merit. What d'you make of that set, Harkness?"

"This is by no means an ordinary radio set, Sir Denis. It's some kind of transmitter. Though what it transmits and where it gets it from are mysteries. We haven't tinkered with it. That's a laboratory job. But Dakin thinks it can convert all sorts of sounds into that one, high, inaudible note on which we had a report from Number One. Evidently this note doesn't become dangerous until it has passed through the special receiver——"

"It's the *receiver* that converts the sound," a clear voice explained.

All three turned in a flash. Lola stood there smiling at them. Sir Denis was first with a chair. Lola thanked him and sat down.

"If you feel up to it, Miss Erskine," he said quietly, "perhaps you would explain in more detail."

"I feel up to anything. Particularly, I feel like an idiot for getting hysterical and then passing out! You see, Sir Denis, *he*" (she seemed to avoid naming Dr. Fu Manchu, as Nayland Smith had known others to do), "was good enough to give me all particulars before leaving me to be shattered. The transmitter, he informed me, is really a sort of selector, or filter. It picks up only certain high notes, vocal or instrumental. On an ordinary receiving set this would come through as atmospheric interference. It was the thing that Brian blew up which converted the sound to what *he* called 'the super-aural key' which shatters everything within range."

She glanced up as Dakin returned from the kitchen quarters.

"It's harmless now, sir," he reported to Nayland Smith. "We have saved *some* evidence."

Another member of Harkness's party appeared in the doorway.

"What now?" Harkness demanded.

"Doc Alex reports that he's suffering from thundering concussion . . . but there isn't a single bruise on his head!"

"Who's this?" Brian asked excitedly.

"Sergeant Ruppert."

"Sergeant Ruppert! Where did you find him?"

"In 420C, the apartment of our next-door neighbours," Nayland Smith told him dryly, "while you were taking care of Miss Erskine." He turned to the man at the door. "Does the doctor think he will recover?"

"He does, sir—and hopes there'll be no complications."

"They found a dead man in there, too, Mr. Merrick," Harkness broke in. "You mightn't recognize him, the way he looks now. But up till today we all mistook him for Sir Denis!"

"I know! But the man in a blue turban?"

"Prince Ranji Bhutani?" Harkness laughed. "He and his horrible-looking servant have vanished, of course. I don't imagine the 'prince' was wearing his blue turban! They must have got away soon after strangling your double, Sir Denis. We had that pair under observation already and there's a fifty-fifty chance we pick them up."

"If Sergeant Ruppert was found there, they evidently got him, too!"

Ray Harkness shook his head. "Four guests on your floor, Mr. Merrick, checked out earlier today. We don't know if any of them belonged to the gang. Only one, Mrs. Nadia Narovska, has disappeared like the 'prince' and left her luggage behind: Number 421. Said to be a very good-looker."

"But she may be coming back," Brian pointed out.

"The management report she came in only a few minutes before the elevator was stopped and the sergeant went on duty at the stair door. How did she get out?"

"But it would be impossible for her to have overpowered a big fellow like that!"

"If she belonged to Fu Manchu," Nayland Smith said bitterly, "and she sounds like one of his women, nothing is impossible! I haven't settled down yet to the fact that that cunning fiend has escaped me again. In my crazy over-confidence I missed my chance. It was my duty to the world when I stood before him to shoot him dead."

He banged his fist into the palm of his left hand.

"They all slipped away in whatever time they had from the attack on Ruppert until Merrick and I came upstairs," Sir Denis went on. "Once on street level, Manhattan was open to them. Our hush-hush policy has defeated its own ends."

"It's not so black as you paint it," Harkness insisted. "We may have lost

the secret of this wonderful air-cover, but if the price Uncle Sam had to pay for it was putting our defences in the hands of Dr. Fu Manchu, we gain more than we lose.”

Nayland Smith forced a smile.

“You may be right. Dr. Fu Manchu has still to get out of the country. . . . Oh, Merrick, Miss Erskine has passed through a frightful ordeal. I suggest you take her along for a champagne cocktail and a good dinner. Dine downstairs. I’ll page you when your father arrives. . . . We shall all have many things to talk about. . . . And I can see that you have a lot of things to say to Lola. . . .”