The Call of Siva

Sax Rohmer

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The Fifth Adventure of Nayland Smith in Pursuit of Fu-Manchu

MY HEAD throbbed madly; my brain seemed to be clogged—inert; and though my first, feeble movement was followed by the rattle of a chain, some moments more elapsed ere I realized that the chain was fastened to a steel collar—that the steel collar was clasped about my neck!

I moaned weakly.

"Smith!" I muttered. "Where are you? Smith?"

On to my knees I struggled, and the pain on the top of my skull grew all but unsupportable. It was coming back to me now: how Nayland Smith and I had started for the hotel to

warn Graham Guthrie; how, as we passed up the steps from the Embankment and into Essex Street, we saw the big motor standing before the door of one of the offices. I could recall coming up level with the car—a modern limousine; but my mind retained no impression of our having passed it—only a vague memory of a rush of footsteps—a blow-

Groping in the darkness, my hands touched a body that lay close beside me. My fingers sought and found the throat—sought and found the steel collar about it.

"Smith!" I groaned; and I shook the still form.

"Smith, old man—speak to me! Smith!"

Could he be dead? Was this the end of his gallant fight with Dr. Fu-Manchu and the murder group? If so, what did the future hold for me—what had I to face?

HE STIRRED beneath my trembling hands.

"Thank God!" I muttered, and I cannot deny that my joy was tainted with selfishness. For, waking in that impenetrable darkness, I had known what fear meant at the realization that alone, chained, I must face the dreadful Chinese doctor.

Smith began incoherent mutterings.

"Sandbagged! Look out, Petrie!—he has us at last! Oh, heavens!" He struggled on to his knees, clutching at my hand.

"All right, old man," I said. "We are both alive! So let's be thankful!"

A moment's silence, a groan, then:

"Petrie—I have dragged you into this. God forgive me—"

"Dry up, Smith," I said shortly. "I'm not a child. There' is no question of being dragged into the matter I'm here; and if I can be of any use, I'm glad that I am here!"

He grasped my hand.

"There were two Chinese, in European clothes—Lord, how my head throbs!—in that office door. They sandbagged us, Petrie—think of it!—in broad daylight, within hail of the Strand! We were rushed into the car—and it was all over before—" His voice grew faint. "Gad! they gave me an awful knock!"

"Why have we been spared, Smith? Do you think he is saving us for—"

"Don't, Petrie! If you had been in China; if you had seen—what I have seen—"

FOOTSTEPS sounded on a flagged passage. A blade of light crept across the floor toward us. My brain was growing clearer. The place had a damp, earthen smell; it was slimy— some noisome cellar. A door was thrown open and a man entered, carrying a lantern. Its light showed my surmise to be accurate—showed the slime-coated walls of a dungeon some fifteen feet square—shone upon the long yellow robe of the man who stood watching us—upon the malignant, intellectual countenance.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu.

At last they were face to face—the head of the great yellow movement and the man who fought on behalf of the entire white race. How can I paint the individual who now stood before us-perhaps the greatest genius of modern times?

Of him it had been fitly said that he had a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan. Something serpentine hypnotic, was in his very presence. Smith drew one sharp breath, and was silent. Together, chained to the wall, two medieval captives, living mockeries of our boasted modern security, we crouched before Dr. Fu-Manchu.

He came forward with an indescribable gait, catlike yet awkward, carrying his high shoulders almost hunched. He placed the lantern in a niche in the wall, never turning away the reptilian gaze of those eyes which must haunt my

dreams forever. They were green with an iridescence which hitherto I had only supposed possible in the eye of a cat. A kind of film intermittently clouded their brightness—but I can speak of them no more.

I had never supposed, prior to meeting Dr. Fu-Manchu, that so intense a force of malignancy could radiate—for it seemed to radiate—from any human being. He spoke. His English was perfect, though at times his words were oddly chosen; his delivery alternately was guttural and sibilant.

"Mr. Smith and Dr. Petrie, your interference with my plans has gone too far. I have seriously turned my attention to you."

HE DISPLAYED his teeth, small and evenly separated, but discolored in a way that was familiar to me. I studied his eyes with a new, professional interest which even the extremity of our danger could not wholly banish. Their greenness seemed to be of the iris; the pupil was oddly contracted—a pin point.

Smith leaned back against the wall with assumed indifference.

"You have presumed." continued Fu-Manchu, "to meddle with a world change. Poor spiders—caught in the wheels of the inevitable! You have linked my name with the futility of

the Young China movement—the name of Fu-Manchu! Mr. Smith, you are an incompetent meddler—I despise you! Dr. Petrie, you are a fool—I am sorry for you!"

He rested one bony hand on his hip, narrowing the long eyes as he looked down on us. The purposeful cruelty of the man was inherent; it was entirely untheatrical. Still Smith remained silent.

"So I am determined to remove you from the scene of your blunders!" added Fu-Manchu.

"Opium will very shortly do the same for you!" I rapped at him savagely.

Without emotion he turned the narrowed eyes upon me.

"That is a matter of opinion, doctor," he said. "You may have lacked the opportunities which have been mine for studying that subject—and in any event I shall not be privileged to enjoy your advice in the future!"

"You will not long outlive me!" I replied. "And our deaths will not profit you, incidentally, because—" Smith's foot touched mine.

"Because?" inquired Fu-Manchu softly. "Ah! Mr. Smith is so prudent! He is thinking that I have *files!*" He pronounced the word in a way that made me shudder. "Mr. Smith has

seen a *wire jacket!* Have you ever seen a wire jacket, doctor? As a surgeon its functions would interest you!"

I stifled a cry that rose to my lips; for with a shrill whistling sound, a small shape came bounding into the dimly lit vault, then shot upward. A marmoset landed on the shoulder of Dr. Fu-Manchu and peered grotesquely into the dreadful yellow face. The doctor raised his bony hand and fondled the little creature, crooning to it unintelligibly.

"One of my pets, Mr. Smith," he said, suddenly opening his eyes fully so that they blazed like green lamps. "I have others— equally useful! My scorpions—have you met my scorpions? No? My pythons and hamadryads? Then there are my fungi and my tiny allies, the *bacilli*. I have a collection in my laboratory quite unique! Have you ever visited Molokai, the leper island, doctor? No? But Mr. Nayland Smith will be familiar with the asylum at Rangoon! And we must not forget my black spiders, with their diamond eyes—my spiders that sit in the dark and watch—then leap!"

HE RAISED his lean hands, so that the sleeve of the robe fell back to the elbow, and the ape dropped, chattering, to the floor and ran from the cellar.

"O God of Cathay!" he cried, "by what death shall they die —these miserable ones who would bind thine empire,

which is boundless!"

Like some priest of Tezcat he stood, his eyes upraised to the roof, his lean body quivering—a sight to shock the most unimpressionable mind.

"He is mad!" I whispered to Smith. "God help us, the man is a dangerous homicidal maniac!"

Nayland Smith's tanned face was very drawn, but he shook his head grimly.

"Dangerous, yes, I agree," he muttered; "his existence is a danger to the entire white race, which now we are powerless to avert!"

Dr. Fu-Manchu recovered himself, took up the lantern, and, turning abruptly, walked to the door, with his awkward yet feline gait. At the threshold he looked back.

"You would have warned Mr. Graham Guthrie?" he said in a soft voice. "To-night, at half-past twelve, Mr. Graham Guthrie dies."

Smith sat silent and motionless, his eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"You were in Rangoon in 1908?" continued Dr. Fu-Manchu. "You remember the Call?"

From somewhere above us—I could not determine the exact direction—came a low, wailing cry, an uncanny thing of falling cadences, which, in that dismal vault, with the sinister, yellow-robed figure at the door, seemed to pour ice into my veins. Its effect upon Smith was truly extraordinary. His face showed grayly in the faint light, and I heard him draw a hissing breath through clenched teeth.

"It calls for you!" said Fu-Manchu. "At half-past twelve it calls for Graham Guthrie!"

The door closed and darkness mantled us again.

"Smith!" I said, "what in God's name was that?" The horrors about us, real and imagined, were playing havoc with my nerves.

"It was the Call of Siva!" replied Smith hoarsely.

"What is it? Who uttered it? What does it mean?"

"I don't know what it is, Petrie, nor who utters it. But it means death!"

THERE may be some who could have lain, chained to the wall of that noisome cell, and felt no fear-no dread of what the blackness might hold. I confess that I am not of these. I knew that Nayland Smith and I stood in the path of the most stupendous genius who, in the world's

history, had devoted his intellect to crime. I knew that the enormous wealth of the political group backing Dr. Fu-Manchu rendered him a menace to Europe and to America greater than that of the plague. He was a scientist trained at a great university—an explorer of nature's secrets who had gone farther into the unknown, I suppose, than any living man. His mission was to remove all obstacles—human obstacles—from the path of that secret movement which was progressing in the Far East. Smith and I were two such obstacles; and of all the horrible devices at his command I wondered, and my tortured brain refused to leave the subject, by which of them we were doomed to be dispatched.

EVEN at that very moment some venomous centipede might be wriggling toward me over the slime of the stones, some poisonous spider be preparing to drop from the roof! Fu-Manchu might have released a serpent in the cellar, or the air be alive with microbes of a loathsome disease!

"Smith!" I said, scarcely recognizing my own voice, "I can't bear this suspense! He intends to kill us, that is certain; but —"

"Don't worry," came the reply, "he intends to learn our plans first."

"You mean—"

"You heard him speak of his files and of his wire jacket!"

"O my God!" I groaned. "Can this be England!"

Smith laughed dryly, and I heard him fumbling with the steel collar about his neck.

"I have one great hope," he said, "since you share my captivity; but we must neglect no minor chance. Try with your pocketknife if you can force the lock. I am trying to break this one."

Truth to tell, the idea had not entered my half-dazed mind, but I immediately acted upon my friend's suggestion, setting to work with the small blade of my knife. I was so engaged, and, having snapped one blade, was about to open another, when a sound arrested me. It came from beneath my feet.

"Smith!" I whispered "Listen!"

The scraping and clicking which told of Smith's efforts ceased. Motionless we sat in that humid darkness and listened.

Something was moving beneath the stones of the cellar. I held my breath; every nerve in my body was strung up.

A line of light showed a few feet from where we lay. It widened—became an oblong. A trap was lifted, and, within a yard of me, there rose a dimly seen head. Horror I had expected—and death, or worse. Instead, I saw a lovely face crowned with a disordered mass of curling hair; I saw a white arm arm upholding the stone slab, a shapely arm clasped about the elbow by a broad gold bangle.

THE girl climbed into the cellar and placed a lantern A on the stone floor. In the dim light she was unreal—a figure from an opium vision, with her clinging silk draperies and garish jewelry, with her bare feet encased in little red slippers. It was difficult to believe that we were in modern, up-to-date England; easy to dream that we were the captives of a caliph in a dungeon of old Bagdad.

"My prayers are answered," said Smith softly. "She has come—to save you!"

"Ssh!" warned the girl, and her wonderful eyes opened widely, fearfully. "A sound and he will kill us all!"

She bent over me; a key jarred in the lock which had broken my penknife—and the collar was off. As I rose to my feet the girl turned and released Smith. She raised the lantern above the trap and signed to us to descend the wooden steps which its light revealed.

"Your knife!" she whispered to me. "Leave it on the floor. He will think you forced the locks. Down! Quickly!"

Nayland Smith disappeared into the darkness. I rapidly followed. Last of all came our mysterious friend, a gold band about one of her ankles gleaming in the rays of the lantern which she carried. We stood in a low arched passage.

"Tie your handkerchiefs over your eyes and do exactly as I tell you!" she ordered.

Neither of us hesitated to obey her. Blindfolded, I allowed her to lead me, and Smith rested his hand upon my shoulder. In that order we proceeded, and came to stone steps, which we ascended.

"Keep to the wall on the left!" came a whisper. "There is danger on the right!"

With my free hand I felt for and found the wall, and we pressed forward. The atmosphere of the place through which we were passing was steamy and loaded with an odor like that of exotic plant life. But a faint animal scent crept to my nostrils too, and there was a subdued stir about me, infinitely suggestive—mysterious.

Now my feet sank in a soft carpet and a curtain brushed my shoulder. A gong sounded. We stopped. The din of distant drumming came to my ears.

"Where in Heaven's name are we?" hissed Smith in my ear. "That is a tom-tom!"

"Ssh! Ssh!"

THE little hand grasping mine quivered nervously. We were near a door or a window, for a breath of perfume was wafted through the air; and it reminded me of my other meetings with the beautiful woman who was now leading us from the house of Fu-Manchu; who with her own lips had told me that she was his slave. Through the horrible phantasmagoria she flitted—a seductive vision, her piquant loveliness standing out richly in its black setting of murder and devilry. Not once, but a thousand times, I had tried to reason out the nature of the tie which bound her to the sinister doctor.

Silence fell.

"Quick! This way!"

Down a thickly carpeted stair we went. Our guide opened a door and led us along a passage. Another door was opened, and we were in the open air. But the girl never tarried, pulling me along a graveled path, with a fresh breeze blowing in my face, and along until, unmistakably, I stood upon the river bank. Now planking creaked to our tread,

and, looking downward beneath the handkerchief, I saw the gleam of water beneath my feet.

"Be careful," I was warned, and found myself stepping into a narrow boat—a punt.

Nayland Smith followed, and the girl pushed the punt off and poled out into the stream.

"Don't speak!" she directed.

My brain was fevered; I scarce knew if I dreamed and was awaking, or if the reality ended with my imprisonment in the clammy cellar and this silent escape, blindfolded, upon the river, with a girl for our guide who might have stepped out of the pages of "The Arabian Nights," were phantasy—the mockery of sleep.

Indeed, I began seriously to doubt if this stream whereon we floated, whose waters plashed and tinkled about us, were the Thames, the Tigris, or the Styx. The punt touched a bank.

"You will hear a clock strike in a few minutes," said the girl, with her soft, charming accent. "But I rely upon your honor not to remove the handkerchiefs until then. You owe me this."

"We do!" said Smith fervently.

I HEARD him scrambling to the bank, and a moment later a soft hand was placed in mine, and I, too, was guided on to terra firma. Arrived on the bank, I still held the girl's hand, drawing her toward me.

"You must not go back!" I whispered. "We will take care of you. You must not return to—that place!"

"Let me go!" she said. "When, once, I asked you to take me from him, you spoke of police protection—that was your answer. Police protection! You would let them lock me up—imprison me—and make me betray him! For what? For *what?*" She wrenched herself free. "How little you understand me! Never mind. Perhaps one day you will know! Until the clock strikes!"

She was gone. I heard the creak of the punt—the drip of the water from the pole. Fainter it grew—and fainter.

"What is her secret?" muttered Smith beside me. "Why does she cling to that monster?"

The distant sound died away entirely. A clock began to strike; it struck the half hour. In an instant my handkerchief was off, and so was Smith's. We stood upon a towing path. Away to the left the moon shone upon the towers and battlements of an ancient fortress.

It was Windsor Castle!

"Half-past ten," cried Smith. "Two hours to save Graham Guthrie!"

We had exactly fourteen minutes in which to catch the last train to Waterloo; and we caught it. But I sank into a corner of the compartment in a state bordering upon collapse. Neither of us, I think, could have managed another twenty yards. With a lesser stake than a human life at issue, I doubt if we should have attempted that dash to Windsor Station.

"Due at Waterloo at 11.51," panted Smith. "That gives us thirty-nine minutes to get to the other side of the river and reach his hotel."

"Where in Heaven's name is that house situated? Did we come up or down stream?"

"I couldn't determine. But at any rate, it stands close to the riverside. It should be merely a question of time to identify it. I shall set Scotland Yard to work immediately; but I am hoping for nothing. Our escape will warn him."

I said no more for a time, sitting wiping the perspiration from my forehead and watching my friend load his cracked briar with the broad-cut Latakia mixture.

"Smith," I said at last, "what was that horrible wailing we heard—and what did Fu-Manchu mean when he referred to Rangoon? I noticed how it affected you."

My friend nodded and lighted his pipe.

"There was a ghastly business there in 1908, or early in 1909," he replied, "an utterly mysterious epidemic. And this beastly wailing was associated with it."

"In what way?—and what do you mean by an epidemic?"

"It began, I believe, at the Mansions Hotel, in the Cantonments. A young American, whose name I cannot recall, was staying there on business connected with some new iron buildings. One night he went to his room, locked the door, and jumped out of the window into the courtyard. Broke his neck of course."

"Suicide?"

"Apparently. But there were singular features in the case. For instance, his revolver lay beside him, fully loaded!"

"In the courtyard?"

"Tn the courtyard!"

"Was it murder by any chance?"

SMITH shrugged his shoulders.

"His door was found locked from the inside; had to be broken in."

"But the wailing business?"

"That began later, or was only noticed later. A French doctor, named Lafitte, died in exactly the same way."

"At the same place?"

"At the same hotel, but he occupied a different room. Here is the extraordinary part of the affair: A friend shared the room with him, and actually saw him go!"

"Saw him leap from the window?"

"Yes. The friend—an Englishman—was aroused by the uncanny wailing. I was in Rangoon at the time, so that I know more of the case of Lafitte than of that of the American. I spoke to the man about it personally. He was an electrical engineer, Edward Martin, and he told me that the cry seemed to come from above him."

"It seemed to come from above when we heard it at Fu-Manchu's house."

"Martin sat up in bed; it was a clear moonlight night—the sort of moonlight you get in Burma. Lafitte, for some reason, had just gone to the window. His friend saw him look out. The next moment, with a dreadful scream, he

threw himself forward—and crashed down into the courtyard!"

"What then?"

"Martin ran to the window and looked down. Lafitte's scream had aroused the place, of course. But there was absolutely nothing to account for the occurrence. There was no balcony, no ledge, by means of which anyone could reach the window."

"But how did you come to recognize the cry?"

"I stopped at the Mansions for some time; and one night this uncanny howling aroused me. I heard it quite distinctly, and am never likely to forget it. It was followed by a hoarse yell. The man in the next room, an orchid hunter, had gone the same way as the others!"

"Did you change your quarters?"

"No. Fortunately for the reputation of the hotel, a first-class establishment, several similar cases occurred elsewhere, both in Rangoon, in Prome, and in Maulmain. A story got about the native quarter, and was fostered by some mad fakir, that the god Siva was reborn and that the cry was his call for victims; a ghastly story which led to an outbreak of dacoity and gave the District Superintendent no end of trouble."

"Was there anything unusual about the bodies?"

"They all developed marks after death, as though they had been strangled! The marks were said all to possess a peculiar form, though it was not appreciable to my eye; and this, again, was declared to be the five heads of Siva."

"Were the deaths confined to Europeans?"

"Oh, no. Several Burmans and others died in the same way. At first there was a theory that the victims had contracted leprosy and committed suicide as a result; but the medical evidence disproved that. The call of Siva became a perfect nightmare throughout Burma."

"Did you ever hear it again, before this evening?"

"Yes. I heard it on the Upper Irrawaddy one clear moonlight night, and a Colassie, a deck hand, leaped from the top deck of the steamer aboard which I was traveling! My God! to think that the fiend Fu-Manchu has brought *that* to England!"

"But brought what, Smith?" I cried in perplexity. "What has he brought? An evil spirit? A mental disease? What is it—what can it be?"

"A new agent of death, Petrie! Something born in a plague spot of Burma—the home of much that is unclean and

much that is inexplicable. Heaven grant that we be in time, and are able, to save Guthrie."

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

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

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

In one of those rooms Graham Guthrie might at that moment be sleeping, all unaware that he would awake to

the Call of Siva to the summons of death. As we neared the Strand, Smith stopped the cab, discharging the man outside Sotheby's auction rooms.

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

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

"Yes, lead on."

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

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

MITH grasped him by the arm.

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

"Here," began the other, staring—

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

"Police, sir?" asked the man civilly.

"Yes," said Smith, "hurry!"

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

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

The man regarded us with a suspicious smile.

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

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

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

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

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

"Is Mr. Guthrie in his room?"

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

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

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

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

E got out of the lift.

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

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

"A dog, for instance?"

"It didn't strike me as being a dog, sir. Anyway, when the party passed me, there was nothing there. Mind you, whatever it was it hadn't come in by the front. I have made inquiries everywhere, but without result." He stopped abruptly. "Number 189—Mr. Guthrie's door, sir!"

Smith knocked.

"Hullo!" came a muffled voice, "what do you want?"

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

He turned to the hotel detective.

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

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

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

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

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

He switched off the light.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I read of it in the Indian papers," said Guthrie, uneasily. "Suicides, were they not?"

"No!" snapped Smith. "Murders!"

There was a brief silence.

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

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

IT was Big Ben. It struck the half hour—leaving the stillness complete. In that room high above the activity which yet prevailed below, high above the supping crowds in the hotel, high above the starving crowds on the Embankment, a curious chill of isolation swept about me.

Again I realized how, in the very heart of the great metropolis, a man may be as far from aid as in the heart of a desert. I was glad that I was not alone in that room marked with the death mark of Fu-Manchu; and I am certain that Graham Guthrie welcomed his unexpected company.

I may have mentioned the fact before; but on this occasion it became so peculiarly evident to me that I am constrained to record it here—I refer to the sense of impending danger

which invariably preceded a visitor from Fu-Manchu. Even had I not known that an attempt was to be made that night, I should have realized it, as, strung to high tension, I waited in the darkness. Some invisible herald went ahead of the dreadful Chinaman, proclaiming his coming to every nerve in one's body. It was like a breath of astral incense, announcing the presence of the priests of death.

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

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

"The Call of Siva," whispered Smith. "Don't stir, for your life!"

GUTHRIE was breathing hard.

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

Three taps sounded very distinctly upon the window.

Graham Guthrie started so as to shake the bed. "It's supernatural!" he muttered—all that was Celtic in his blood recoiling from the omen. "Nothing human can reach that window!"

"Ssh!"—from Smith. "Don't stir."

The tapping was repeated.

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

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

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

Three taps sounded on the panes above us.

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

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

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

Smith leaned from the window and looked up.

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

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

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

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

"The light! The light!" I cried.

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

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

My hands at witch, I seized the strangling cord.

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

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

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

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

"The mark of Kali," he said. "The man was a *phansigar*—a religious strangler. Since Fu-Manchu has dacoits in his service, I might have expected that he would have thugs. A group of these fiends would seem to have fled into Burma: so that the mysterious epidemic in Rangoon was really an outbreak of thuggee—on slightly improved lines! I had suspected something of the kind, but naturally I had not looked for thugs near Rangoon. My unexpected resistance led the strangler to bungle the rope. You have seen how it was fastened about my throat? That was unscientific. The true method, as practiced by the group operating in Burma,

was to throw the line about the victim's neck and jerk him from the window. A man leaning from an open window is very nicely poised. It requires only a slight jerk to pitch him forward. No loop was used, but a running line—which, as the victim fell, remained in the band of the murderer! No clue! Therefore, we see at once what commended the system to Fu-Manchu!"

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

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

He grasped Smith's hand.

"You see," Guthrie continued, "no one thought of looking for a thug in Burma. And no one thought of the *roof!* These fellows are as active as monkeys, and where an ordinary man would infallibly break his neck, they are entirely at home. I might have chosen my room specially for the business! I'm quite isolated, and there is a fire ladder to the roof at the end of the corridor!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"God help her!"

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