

The Third of the Fu-Manchu Stories

Redmoat

By Sax Rohmer

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"We are fools! Loose the dog! If anything human lurks there, he will lead us to it!"

Life of Mr. Nayland Smith. But if the same man wants to kill my father, why has he not done so? "I am afraid you possess me!" "Of course I must do so. But the man in the train. He could have killed us both quite easily! And last night some one was in father's room!" "In his room?" "I could not sleep, and I heard something moving. My room is the next one. I knocked on the wall and woke father. There was nothing, so I said it was the howling of the dog that had frightened me!" "You could say any one got into his room!" "I cannot imagine. But I am not sure it was a man!" "Miss Editham, you alarm me. What do you suspect?" "You must think me hysterical and silly; but while father and I have been away from Redmoat perhaps the usual precautions have been neglected. Is there any creature—any large creature—which could climb up a wall to the window? Do you know of anything with a long, thin body?" "For a moment I offered no reply, studying the girl's pretty face, her eager, blue-gray eyes widely opened and fixed upon mine. She was not of the neurotic type, with her clear complexion and sun-kissed neck; her arms, healthy toned and firm, and she had the agile shape of a young woman, with none of the anemic largeness which breeds morbid dreams. She was frightened—yes, who would not have been? But the mere idea of this thing which she believed to be in Redmoat, without the apparition of the green eyes, must have prostrated a victim of "nerves."

ing standard without killing him." "Quite so. He probably has instructions to be careful. But God help the victims of Chinese mercy!" "I went to my own room then. But I did not even undress, ruffling my pipe and seating myself at the open window. I had seen Fu-Manchu once. But having looked upon the awful Chinese doctor, the memory of his face, with its filmed green eyes, could never leave me. The idea that he might be near, at that moment, was a poor narcotic. The howling and baying of the mastiff was almost continuous. The dog's attack in Redmoat was full, the dog's mournful note yet rose on the night, with something menacing in it. I sat looking out across the sloping turf to where the shrubbery showed as a black island in a green sea. The moon swam in a cloudless sky, and the air was warm and fragrant with country smells. It was in the shrubbery that Denby's collar had met his mysterious death—that the thing seen by Miss Editham had disappeared. What ungodly secret did it hold? Caesar became silent. As the stopping of a clock will sometimes awaken a sleeper, the abrupt cessation of that distant howling, to which I had grown accustomed, now recalled me from a world of gloomy imaginings. I glanced at my watch in the moonlight. It was twelve minutes past midnight. As I stepped in, the dog suddenly burst out across the lawn, and in a tone of sheer anger. He was alternately howling and snarling in a way that sounded very much like the crashing, as he leaped to the end of his chain, shook the building in which he was confined. It was as if I stood up to lean from the window and command a view of the corner of the house that he broke loose. With a hoarse bay he took that decisive leap, and I heard his heavy body fall against the wooden wall. There followed a strange, guttural cry and the growling of the dog died away at the rear of the house. He was out! But that guttural note had come from the throat of a dog. Of what was he in pursuit? At which point his mysterious quarry entered the shrubbery I do not know. I only knew that I saw absolutely nothing until Caesar's lithe shape was streaked across the lawn, and that creature went crashing into the undergrowth. Then a faint sound above and to my right told me that I was not the only spectator of the scene. I leaped further from the window. "Is that you, Miss Editham?" I asked. "Oh, Doctor Petrie!" she said. "I am so glad you are awake! Can we do nothing to help Caesar? He will be killed!" "Did you see what he went after?" "Yes," she called back—and drew her breath sharply. For a strange figure went racing across the grass. It was that of a man in a blue dressing gown, who held a lantern high before him and a revolver in his right hand. Coincident with my recognition of Mr. Editham he leaped into the shrubbery in the wake of the dog! But the night had yet another surprise, for Nayland Smith's voice came: "Come back! Come back, Editham!" I ran out into the passage and downstairs. The front door was open. A terrible conflict raged in the shrubbery between the mastiff and something else. Fastening round to the lawn, I met Smith fully dressed. He had just dropped from a first-floor window. "The man is mad!" he snapped. "Can he know what lurks there? He should not have gone alone!" Together we ran toward the dancing light of Editham's lantern. The sounds of conflict ceased suddenly. Stumbling over stumps and lashed by low-hanging branches, we struggled forward to where the clergyman knelt among the bushes. He gazed up with tears in his eyes, as we revealed by the dim light. "Look!" he cried. "The body of the dog lay at his feet. It was pitiable to think that the creature which should have met his death in such a fashion, and when I bent and examined him I was glad to find that he was still alive. "Drag him out. He is not dead!" I said. "And hurry!" rapped Smith, peering about him right and left. So we three hurried from that haunted place, dragging the dog with us. We were not molested. No sound disturbed the now perfect stillness. By the lawn edge we came upon Denby, half-dressed, and almost immediately Edwards, the gardener, also appeared. The white faces of the house servants showed at one window and Miss Editham called to me from her room: "Is he dead?" "No," I replied, "only stunned." We carried the dog round to the yard, and I examined his back. It had been struck by some heavy, blunt instrument, but the skull was not broken. It is hard to kill a mastiff. "Will you attend to him, doctor?" asked Editham. "We must see that the villain does not escape!" His face was grim and set. This was a different man from the diffident clergyman we knew; this was "Parson Dan" again. I accepted the care of the canine patient, and Editham, with the others, went off for more lights to search the shrubbery. As I was washing a bad wound between the mastiff's ears, Miss Editham joined me. It was the sound of her voice, I think, rather than my more scientific ministrations, which recalled Caesar to life. For, as she entered, his tail wagged feebly, and a moment later he struggled to his feet—one of which was injured. Having provided for his immediate needs, I left him in charge of his young mistress and joined the search party. They had entered the shrubbery from four points, and drawn blank. "There is absolutely nothing there, and no one can possibly have left the grounds," said Editham angrily. "With the first sound of the dog's howling, I heard and I tested the electrical contrivances from every point. They were in perfect order. It became more and more inconceivable how any one could have entered and quitted without any one's getting in during the day while the gates are open and hiding until dusk. But how in the name of all that's wonderful does he get out? He must possess the attributes of a bird!" At the spot where we had found the dog, some five paces to the west of the copper beech, the grass and weeds were trampled and the surrounding laurels and rhododendrons bore evidence of a struggle—but no human footprint could be found. "The ground is dry," said Smith. "We cannot expect much." "In my opinion," I said, "some one tried to get at Caesar's presence a dangerous, and in his rage he broke loose." "I think so, too," agreed Smith. "But why did this person make for here? And how, having mastered the dog, got out of Redmoat? I am open to admit the possibility of some one's getting in during the day while the gates are open and hiding until dusk. But how in the name of all that's wonderful does he get out? He must possess the attributes of a bird!" I thought of Grebe Editham's statements, reminding my friend of her description of the thing which she had seen passing into this strangely haunted shrubbery. "That line of speculation soon takes us out of our depth," Petrie! he said. "Let us stick to what we can understand, and that may help us to a clearer idea of what at present is incomprehensible. My view of the case to date stands thus: (1) Editham, having rashly decided to return to the interior of China, is warned by an official whose friendship he has won in some way to stay in England. (2) Several attempts of which we know but little, to get at Editham are frustrated, presumably by his curious defenses. An attempt in a train fails owing to Miss Editham's diabolical arrangement of the room. An attempt here fails owing to her insomnia. (3) During Editham's absence from Redmoat certain preparations are made for his return. These lead to: (a) The death of Denby's collar.

"I recall the circumstances, Mr. Editham," said Smith, with an odd note in his voice. "I have been endeavoring to think where I had come across the name, and a moment ago I remembered. I am happy to have that you, sir." The clergyman blushed again like a girl, and slightly inclined his head, with his scanty hair. "Has Redmoat, as its name implies, a most round top? It was unable to see in the dusk." "It remains. Redmoat—a corruption of a round moat—was formerly a priory, disestablished by the eighth Henry in 1534. His pedantic manner was quaint at times. "But the moat is no longer flooded. In fact, we grow cabbages in parts of it! If you refer to the strategic strength of the place"—he smiled, but his manner was unbecomingly earnest—"it is considerable. I have barbed-wire fencing, and other appliances. The sea is a lonely spot," he added apologetically. "And now, if you will excuse me, we will resume these gruesome inquiries after the more pleasant affairs of dinner." He left us. "Who is our host?" I asked, as the door closed. Smith smiled. "You are wondering what caused the 'episcopal blood'?" he suggested. "Well, the deep-seated prejudices which our reverend friend stirred up culminated in the Boxer riots!" "Good heavens, Smith!" I said, for I could not reconcile the diffident personality of the clergyman with the memories which those words awakened. "He evidently should be on our danger list," my friend continued quickly. "But he has so completely effaced himself of recent years that I think it probable that some one else has only just recalled his existence to me!" The Rev. J. D. Editham, my dear Petrie, though he may be a poor hand at saving souls, at any rate has saved a score of Christian women from death—and worse!" "J. D. Editham?" I began. "Is 'Parson Dan'?" rapped Smith—"The Fighting Missionary" the man who, with a garb of a dozen ruffles and a German doctor, held the hospital at Nan-Tsang against 300 Boxers! That's who the Rev. J. D. Editham is! But what is he up to now I have yet to find out. He is keeping something back—something which has made him an object of interest to young China!" "Redmoat," said the Rev. J. D. Editham, "has latterly become the theater of strange doings." He stood on the hearth in his library. A shaded lamp upon the big table and candles in ancient sconces upon the mantelpiece afforded dim illumination. Mr. Editham's nephew, Vernon Denby, lolled smoking on the window seat, and I sat near him. Nayland Smith paced fitfully up and down the room. "Some months ago this year," continued the clergyman, "a burglarious attempt was made upon the house. There was an arrest, and the man confessed that he had been bribed by my collection. He waved his hand vaguely toward the several cabinets about the shadowed room. "I was shortly afterward that I allowed my hobby for playing at forts to run away with me. I was playing at fortifications, I virtually fortified Redmoat—against trespassers of any kind, I mean. You have seen that the house had been surrounded by a kind of large moat, artificial, being the buried ruins of a Roman outwork, a portion of the ancient castrum." Again he waved indistinctly, this time toward the window. "When it was a priory it was completely isolated and defended by its environment moat. Today it is completely surrounded by barbed-wire fencing! Below this fence, on the east, a narrow stream, tributary of the Waverley, on the north and west, the highroad, but nearly twenty feet below, and the banks are perpendicular. On the south is the remaining part of the moat—now my kitchen garden; but from there up to the level of the house is nearly twenty feet again, and the barbed wire must be counted with." "The entrance, as you know, is by way of a kind of cutting. There is a gate at the foot of the steps that are some of the original steps of the priory, Doctor Petrie, and another gate at the head." He paused, and smiled around upon us boyishly. "My secret defenses remain to be mentioned," he resumed, and opening a cupboard he pointed to a row of bottles, with a number of electric bells upon the wall behind him. "The more vulnerable spots are connected at night with these bells," he said triumphantly. "Any attempt to scale the barbed wire or to force either gate would set two or more of these ringing! A stray cow raised one false alarm," he added, "and a careless rook threw us into a perfect panic on another occasion." He was so boyish—so nervously brisk and so subtly sensitive—that it was difficult to see in him the hero of the Nan-Tsang Hospital. I could only suppose that he had treated the Boxers with the same spirit wherein he had not been a trespasser within the precincts of Redmoat. It had been an escape of which he was extraordinarily ashamed, as a faintly, he was ashamed of his "fortifications." "But," rapped Smith, "it was not the visit of the burglar which prompted these elaborate precautions?" Mr. Editham nodded nervously. "I am aware," he said, "that having invoked official aid, I must be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Smith. It is the burglar who was responsible for my continuing the wire fence all round the grounds, but the electrical contrivances followed later as a result of several disastrous nights. My secret defenses were about some one who came, they said, at dusk. No one could describe this nocturnal visitor, but certainly we found traces. I must admit that.

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