The Fourth Fu-Manchu Story

The Green Mist

By Sax Rohmer

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NAYLAND SMITH came in and threw himself into an armchair, facing me across the table.

"I have seen Sir Lionel Barton," he said, "and, to put the whole thing in a nutshell, he has laughed at me. During the months that I have been wondering where he had gone to, he has been somewhere in Egypt. He certainly bears a charmed life, for on the evidence of his letter to the Times he has seen things in Tibet which Fu-Manchu would have the west blind to; in fact, I think he has found a new keyhole to the gate of the Indian Empire!"

Smith's darkly tanned face had grown leaner than ever, since he had begun his fight with the most uncanny opponent, I suppose, against whom a man ever had pitted himself—Doctor Fu-Manchu. He stood up and began restlessly to pace the room, furiously stuffing tobacco into his briar.

Long ago we had placed the name of Sir Lionel Barton upon the list of those whose lives stood between Fu-Manchu and the attainment of his end. Orientalist and explorer; the fearless traveler who first had penetrated to Lassa, who thrice, as a pilgrim, had entered forbidden Mecca; he now had turned his attention again to Tibet, thereby signing his own death warrant.

"That he has reached England alive is a hopeful sign?" I suggested.

Smith shook his head and lighted the blackened briar. "England at present is the web," he replied. "The spider will be waiting! Petrie, I sometimes despair. Sir Lionel is an impossible man to shepherd. You ought to see his house at Finchley! A low, squat place completely hemmed in by trees. Damp as a swamp, smells like a jungle. Everything topsy-turvy. He only arrived today, and he is working and eating (and sleeping I expect) in a study that looks like an earthquake at Sotheby's auction rooms. The rest of the house is half a menagerie and half a circus! He has a Bedouin groom, a Chinese body servant and heaven only knows what other strange people!"

"Chinese!"

"Yes—I saw him, a squinting Cantonese he calls Kwee. I don't like him. Also, there is a secretary known as Strozza, who has an unpleasant face. He is a fine linguist, I understand, and is engaged upon the Spanish notes for Barton's forthcoming book on the Mayapan temples. By the way, all Sir Lionel's baggage disappeared from the landing stage, including his Tibetan notes!"

"Significant!"

"Of course! But he argues that he has crossed Tibet from the Kuenlun to the Himalayas without being assassinated and therefore that it is unlikely he will meet with that fate in London. I left him dictating the book from memory, at the rate of about 200 words a minute!"

"He is wasting no time!"

"Wasting time! In addition to the Yucatan book and the work on Tibet, he has to read a paper at the Institute next week about some tomb he has unearthed in Egypt. As I came away, a van drove up from the docks and a couple of fellows delivered a sarcophagus as big as a boat. It is unique, according to Sir Lionel, and will go to the British Museum after he has examined it. The man crams six months' work into six weeks, then he is off again."

"What do you propose to do?"

"What can I do? I know that Fu-Manchu will make an attempt upon him. I cannot doubt it. Ugh! that house gave me the shudders! No sunlight, I'll swear, Petrie, can ever penetrate to the rooms, and when I arrived this afternoon, clouds of gnats floated like motes wherever a stray beam filtered through the trees of the avenue. There's a steamy smell about the place that is almost malarious, and the whole of the west front is covered with a sort of monkey creeper, which he has imported at some time or other. It has a close, exotic perfume that is quite in the picture. I tell you the place was made for murder!"

"Have you taken any precautions?"

"I called in at Scotland Yard and sent a man down to watch the house, but—"

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"What is Sir Lionel like?"

"A madman, Petrie! A tall, massive man, wearing a dirty dressing gown of neutral color; a man with untidy gray hair and a bristling mustache, keen blue eyes and a brown skin, who wears a short beard, or rarely shaves—I don't know which! I left him striding about among the thousand and one curiosities of that incredible room, picking his way through antique furniture, works of reference, manuscripts, mummies, spears, pottery, and what not—sometimes kicking a book from his course or stumbling over a stuffed crocodile or a Mexican mask—alternately dictating and conversing! Phew!"

For some time we were silent.

"Smith," I said, "we are making no headway in this business. With all the forces arrayed against him, Fu-Manchu still eludes us, still pursues his devilish, inscrutable way!"

Nayland Smith nodded.

"And we don't know all," he said. "We mark such and such a man as one alive to the yellow peril, and we warn him—if we have time. Perhaps he escapes, perhaps he does not. But what do we know, Petrie, of those others who may die every week by his murderous agency? We cannot know every one who has read the riddle of China. I never see a report of some one found drowned, of an apparent suicide, of a sudden though seemingly natural death, without wondering! I tell you, Fu-Manchu is omnipresent; his tentacles embrace everything! I said that Sir Lionel must bear a charmed life. The fact that we are alive is a miracle!"

He glanced at his watch.

"Nearly eleven," he said. "But sleep seems a waste of time—apart from its dangers."

We heard a bell ringing. A few moments later followed a knock at the room door.

"Come in!" I cried.

A girl entered with a telegram, addressed to Smith. His jaw looked very square in the lamplight, and his eyes shone like steel as he took it from her and opened the envelope. He glanced at the form, stood up, and passed it to me, reaching for his hat, which lay upon my writing table.

"God help us, Petrie!" he said.

This was the message.

"Sir Lionel Barton murdered. Meet me at his house at once. WEYMOUTH, Inspector."

Although we avoided all unnecessary delay, it was close upon midnight when our cab swung round into a darkly shadowed avenue at the farther end of which, as seen through a tunnel, the moonlight glittered upon the windows of Rowan House, Sir Lionel Barton's home.

Stepping out before the porch of the long, squat building, I saw that it was banked in, as Smith had said, by trees and shrubs. The facade showed mantled in the strange exotic creeper which he had mentioned, and the air was pungent with an odor of decaying vegetation with which mingled the heavy perfume of the little nocturnal red flower that bloomed luxuriantly upon the creeper.

The place looked a veritable wilderness, and when we were admitted to the hall by Inspector Weymouth, I saw that the interior was in keeping with the exterior; for the hall was constructed from the model of some apartment in an Assyrian temple, and the squat columns, the low seats, the hangings, all were eloquent of neglect, being thickly dust coated. The musty smell, too, was almost as pronounced here as outside beneath the trees.

To a library whose contents overflowed in many literary torrents upon the floor, the detective conducted us.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "what's that!"

Something leaped from the top of a bookcase, ambled silently across the littered carpet, and passed from the library like a golden streak. I stood looking after it with startled eyes. Inspector Weymouth laughed dryly.

"It's a young puma, or a civet cat, or something, doctor!" he said. "This house is full of surprises—and mysteries."

His voice was not quite steady, I thought, and he carefully closed the door ere proceeding further.

"Where is he?" asked Nayland Smith harshly. "How was it done?"

Weymouth sat down and lighted a cigar which I offered him.

"I thought you might like to hear what led up to it—so far as we know—before seeing him?"

Smith nodded.

"Well," continued the inspector, "the man you arranged to send down from the Yard got here all right and took up a post in the road outside, where he could command a good view of the gates. He saw and heard nothing, until going on for half-past ten, when a young lady turned up and went in."

"A young lady?"

"Miss Edmonds, Sir Lionel's shorthand typist. She had found, after getting home, that her bag with her purse in was missing, and she came back to see if she had left it here. She gave the alarm. My man heard the row from the road and came in. Then he ran out and rang us up. I immediately wired for you."

"He heard the row, you say. What row?"

"Miss Edmonds went into violent hysterics!"

Smith was pacing the room now in tense excitement.

"Describe what he saw when he came in."

"He saw a negro footman—there isn't an Englishman in the house—trying to pacify the girl out in the hall [illegible] beating their foreheads and howling! There was no sense to be got out of any of them, so he started to investigate for himself. He had taken the bearings of the place earlier in the evening, and from the light in a window on the ground floor had located the study, so he started to look for the door. When he found it, it was locked from the inside."

"Well!"

"He went out and round to the window. There's no blind, and from the shrubbery you can see into the lumber room known as the study. He looked in—as apparently Miss Edmonds had done before him. What he saw accounted for her hysterics!"

Both Smith and I were hanging upon his words.

"All among the rubbish on the floor, a big Egyptian mummy case was lying on its side, and face downward, with his arms thrown across it, lay Sir Lionel Barton!"

"My God! Yes, go on."

"There was only a shaded reading lamp alight, and it stood on a chair shining right down on him; it made a patch of light on the floor, you understand." The inspector indicated its extent with his hands. "Well, as the man smashed the glass and got the window open, and was just climbing in—he saw something else * * * so he says!"

He paused.

"What did he see?" demanded Smith shortly.

"A sort of green mist, sir! He says it seemed to be alive! It moved over the floor, about a foot from the ground—going away from him and toward a curtain at the other end of the study."

Nayland Smith fixed his eyes upon the speaker.

"Out over the table billowed a sort of yellowish-green cloud, an oily vapor. 'Run, Smith!' I screamed—'the door, for your life!'"

"Where did he first see this green mist?"

"He says, Mr. Smith, that he thinks it came from the mummy case!"

"Yes, go on."

"It's to his credit that he climbed into the room after seeing a thing like that. He did. He turned the body over, and Sir Lionel looked horrible. He was quite dead. Then Croxted—that's the man's name—went over to this curtain. There was a glass door. He opened it, and it gave on a conservatory—a place stacked from the tiled floor to the glass roof with more rubbish. It was dark inside, but enough light came from the study (it's really a drawing room, by the way), as he'd turned all the lamps on, to give him another glimpse of this green crawling mist. There are three steps to go down. On the steps lay a dead Chinaman!"

"A dead Chinaman?"

"A dead Chinaman!"

"Doctor seen them?" rapped Smith.

"Yes, a local man. He was out of his depth, I could see; contradicted himself three times. But there's no need for another opinion—until we get the coroner's!"

"And Croxted?"

"Croxted was taken ill, Mr. Smith, and had to be sent home in a cab."

"What ails him?"

Detective Inspector Weymouth raised his eyebrows, and carefully knocked the ash from his cigar.

"He held out until I came, gave me the story, and then fainted right away. He said that something in the conservatory place seemed to get him by the throat!"

"Did he mean that literally?"

"I couldn't say. We had to send the girl home, too, of course."

Nayland Smith was pulling thoughtfully at the lobe of his left ear.

"Got any theory?" he jerked.

Weymouth shrugged his shoulders.

"Not one that includes the green mist!" he said. "Shall we go in now?"

We crossed the Assyrian hall, where the members of that strange household were gathered in a panic-stricken group. They numbered four. Two of them were negroes, and two easterners of some kind. I missed the Chinaman Kwee, of whom Smith had spoken, and the Italian secretary; and from the way in which my friend peered about into the shadows of the hall I divined that he, too, wondered at their absence. We entered Sir Lionel's study—an apartment which I despair of describing.

Nayland Smith's words, "an earthquake at Sotheby's auction rooms," leaped to my mind at once, for the place was simply stacked with curious litter, loot of Africa, Mexico and Persia. In a clearing by the hearth a gas stove stood upon a packing case, and about it lay a number of utensils for camp cookery. The odor of rotting vegetation, mingled with the insistent perfume of the strange night-blooming flowers, was borne in through the open window.

In the center of the floor, beside an overturned sarcophagus, lay a figure in a neutral-colored dressing gown, face downward, the arms thrust forward and over the side of the ancient Egyptian mummy case.

My friend advanced and knelt beside the dead man.

"Good God!"

Smith sprang upright and turned with an extraordinary expression to Inspector Weymouth.

"You do not know Sir Lionel Barton by sight?" he rapped.

"No," began Weymouth, "but—"

"This is not Sir Lionel! This is Strozza, the secretary!"

"What!" shouted Weymouth.

"Where is the other—the Chinaman—quick!" cried Smith.

"I have had him left where he was found, on the conservatory steps," said the inspector.

Smith ran across the room to where, beyond the open door, a glimpse might be obtained of stacked-up curiosities. Holding back the curtain to allow more light to penetrate, he bent forward over a crumpled-up figure which lay upon the steps below.

"It is!" he cried loudly. "It is Sir Lionel's servant—Kwee!"

Weymouth and I looked at one another across the body of the Italian, then our eyes turned together to where my friend, grim-faced, stood over the dead Chinaman. A breeze whispered through the leaves, a great wave of exotic perfume swept from the open window toward the curtained doorway.

It was a breath of the east—the inscrutable east which had stretched out a yellow hand to the west. It was symbolic of the subtle, intangible power manifested in Doctor Fu-Manchu as Nayland Smith—lean, agile, bronzed with the suns of Burma—was symbolic of the clean British efficiency which sought to combat the insidious enemy.

"One thing is evident," said Smith. "No one in the house, Strozza excepted, knew that Sir Lionel was absent."

"How do you arrive at that?" asked Weymouth.

"The servants in the hall are [illegible]. If they had seen him go out they would know that it must be some one else who lies here."

"What about the Chinaman?"

"Since there is no other means of entrance to the conservatory save through the study, Kwee must have hidden himself there at some time when his master was absent from this room."

"Croxted found the communicating door closed. What killed the Chinaman?"

"Both Miss Edmonds and Croxted found the study door locked from the inside. What killed Strozza?" retorted Smith.

"You will have noted," continued the inspector, "that the secretary is wearing Sir Lionel's dressing gown. It was seeing him in that as she looked in at the window which led Miss Edmonds to mistake him for her employer—and consequently to put us on the wrong scent."

"He wore it in order that anybody looking in at the window would be sure to make that mistake!" rapped Smith.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he came here for a felonious purpose. See?" Smith stooped and took up several tools from the litter on the floor. "There lies the lid. He came to open the sarcophagus. It contained the mummy of some notable person who flourished under Meneptah II; and Sir Lionel told me that a number of valuable ornaments and jewels probably were secreted among the wrappings. He proposed to open the thing and to submit the entire contents to examination tonight. He evidently changed his mind—fortunately for himself."

I ran my fingers through my hair in perplexity.

"Then what has become of the mummy?"

Nayland Smith laughed dryly.

"It has vanished in the form of a green vapor apparently," he said. "Look at Strozza's face!"

He turned the body over, and used as I was to such spectacles, the contorted features of the Italian filled me with horror, so suggestive were they of a death more than ordinarily violent. I pulled aside the dressing gown and searched the body for marks, but failed to find any. Nayland Smith crossed the room, and, assisted by the detective, carried Kwee, the Chinaman, into the study and laid him fully in the light. His puckered yellow face presented a sight even more awful than the other, and his blue lips were drawn back, exposing both upper and lower teeth. There were no marks of violence, but his limbs, like Strozza's, had been tortured during his mortal struggles into unnatural postures.

The breeze was growing higher, and pungent odor waves from the damp shrubbery, bearing, too, the oppressive sweetness of the creeping plant, swept constantly through the open window. Inspector Weymouth carefully relighted his cigar.

"I'm with you thus far, Mr. Smith," he said. "Strozza, knowing Sir Lionel to be absent, locked himself in here to rifle the mummy case, for Croxted, entering by way of the window, found the key on the inside. Strozza didn't know that the Chinaman was hidden in the conservatory—"

"And Kwee did not dare to show himself, because he, too, was there for some mysterious reason of his own," interrupted Smith.

"Having got the lid off—something—somebody—"

"Suppose we say the mummy!"

Inspector Weymouth laughed uneasily.

"Well, sir, something that vanished from a locked room without opening the door or the window—killed Strozza—"

"And something which, having killed Strozza, next killed the Chinaman, apparently without troubling to open the door behind which he lay concealed!" Smith continued. "For once in a way, inspector, Doctor Fu-Manchu has employed an ally which even his giant will was unable entirely to subjugate. What blind force—what terrific agent of death—had he confined in that sarcophagus!"

"You think this is the work of Fu-Manchu?" I said. "If you are correct, his power indeed is more than human!"

Something in my voice, I suppose, brought Smith right about. He surveyed me curiously.

"Can you doubt it? The presence of a concealed Chinaman surely is sufficient. Kwee, I feel assured, was one of the murder group, though probably he had only recently entered that mysterious service. He is unarmed, or I should feel disposed to think that his part was to assassinate Sir Lionel while, unsuspecting the presence of a hidden enemy, he was at work here. Strozza's opening the sarcophagus clearly spoiled the scheme."

"And led to the death—"

"Of a servant of Fu-Manchu? Yes. I am at a loss to account for that."

"Do you think that the sarcophagus entered into the scheme, Smith?"

My friend looked at me in evident perplexity.

"You mean that its arrival at the time when a creature of the doctor's—Kwee—was concealed here may have been a coincidence?"

I nodded, and Smith bent over the sarcophagus, curiously examining the garish paintings with which it was decorated inside and out. It lay sideways upon the floor, and seizing it by its edge, he turned it over.

"Heavy," he muttered, "but Strozza must have capsized it as he fell. He would not have laid it on its side to remove the lid. Hullo!"

He bent further forward, catching at a piece of twine, and out of the mummy case pulled a rubber stopper or "cork."

"This was stuck in a hole down near the corner," he said. "Ugh! it has a disgusting smell!"

I took it from his hands and was about to examine it, when a loud voice sounded outside in the hall. The door was thrown open, and a big man, who, despite the warmth of the weather, wore a fur-lined overcoat, rushed impetuously into the room.

"Sir Lionel!" cried Smith eagerly. "I warned you! And see—you have had a very narrow escape!"

Sir Lionel Barton glanced at what lay upon the floor, then from Smith to myself, and from me to Inspector Weymouth. He dropped into one of the few chairs unstacked with books.

"Mr. Smith," he said with emotion, "what does this mean? Tell me—quickly."

In brief terms Smith detailed the happenings of the night—or so much as he knew of them. Sir Lionel Barton listened, sitting quite still the while—an unusual repose in a man of such evidently tremendous nervous activity.

"He came for the jewels," he said slowly, when Smith was finished, and his eyes turned to the body of the dead Italian. "I was wrong to submit him to the temptation. God knows what Kwee was doing in hiding. Perhaps he had come to murder me, as you surmise, Mr. Smith, though I find it hard to believe. But I don't think this is the handiwork of your Chinese doctor!" he fixed his gaze upon the sarcophagus.

Smith stared at him in surprise. "What do you mean, Sir Lionel?"

The famous traveler continued to look toward the sarcophagus with something in his blue eyes that might have been dread.

"I received a wire from Professor Rembold tonight," he continued. "You were correct in supposing that no one but Strozza knew of my absence. I dressed hurriedly and met the professor at the Traveler's. He knew that I was to read a paper next week upon"—again he looked toward the mummy case—"the tomb of Mekara, and he knew that the sarcophagus had been brought untouched to England. He begged of me not to open it."

Nayland Smith was studying the speaker's face.

"What reason did he give for so extraordinary a request?" he asked.

Sir Lionel Barton hesitated.

"One," he replied at last, "which amused me—at the time. I must inform you that Mekara—whose tomb my agent had discovered during my absence in Tibet, and to enter which I broke my return journey at Alexandria—was a high priest and first prophet of Amen—under the pharaoh of the exodus; in short, one of the magicians who contested in magic arts with Moses! I thought the discovery unique—until Professor Rembold furnished me with some curious particulars respecting the death of M. Page le Roi, the French Egyptologist—particulars new to me."

We listened in growing surprise, scarcely knowing to what this tended.

"M. le Roi," continued Barton, "discovered, but kept secret, the tomb of Amenti—another of this particular brotherhood. It appears that he opened the mummy case on the spot—these priests were of royal line and are buried in the valley of Biban-el-Moluk. His fellah and Arab servants deserted him for some reason—on seeing the mummy case—and he was found dead, apparently strangled, beside it. The matter was hushed up by the Egyptian government; Rembold could not explain why. But he begged of me not to open the sarcophagus of Mekara."

A silence fell.

The true facts regarding the sudden death of Page le Roi, which I now heard for the first time, had impressed me unpleasantly, coming from a man of Sir Lionel Barton's experience and reputation.

"How long had it lain at the docks?" jerked Smith.

"For two days, I believe. I am not a superstitious man, Mr. Smith, but neither is Professor Rembold, and now that I know the facts respecting Page le Roi, I can find it in my heart to thank God that I did not see—whatever came out of that sarcophagus!"

Nayland Smith stared him hard in the face.

"I am glad you did not, Sir Lionel," he said, "for whatever the Priest Mekara has to do with the matter, by means of his sarcophagus, Doctor Fu-Manchu has made his first attempt upon your life! He has failed, but I hope you will accompany me from here to a hotel. He will not fail twice!"

It was the night following that of the double tragedy at Rowan House. Nayland Smith, with Inspector Weymouth, was engaged in some mysterious inquiry, at the docks, and I had remained at home to bring up to date that strange chronicle, which I hoped to live to publish, of our dealings with the satanic genius, Doctor Fu-Manchu. And—why should I not confess it?—my memories had frightened me.

I was arranging my notes respecting the case of Sir Lionel Barton. They were hopelessly incomplete. For instance, I had jotted down the following queries: (1) Did any true parallel exist between the death of M. Page le Roi and the death of Kwee the Chinaman, and of Strozza? (2) What had become of the mummy of Mekara? (3) How had the murderer escaped from a locked room? (4) What was the purpose of the rubber stopper? (5) Why was Kwee hiding in the conservatory? (6) Was the green mist a mere subjective hallucination—a figment of Croxted's imagination—or had he actually seen it?

Until these questions were satisfactorily answered further progress was impossible. Nayland Smith frankly admitted that he was out of his depth. "It looks on the face of it more like a case for the Psychical Research people than for a plain Civil Servant, lately of Mandalay," he had said only that morning.

"Sir Lionel Barton really believes that supernatural agencies were brought into operation by the opening of the high priest's coffin! For my part, even if I believed the same, I should still maintain that Doctor Fu-Manchu controlled those agencies. But reason it out for yourself and see if we arrive at any common center. Don't work so much upon the datum of the green mist, but keep to the facts which are established."

I commenced to knock out my pipe in the ash tray; then paused, pipe in hand. The house was quite still, for my landlady and all the small household were out.

Above the noise of a passing tramcar I had thought I heard that hall door open. In the ensuing silence I sat and listened.

Not a sound! Stay; I slipped my hand into the table drawer, took out my revolver, and stood up.

There was a sound. Some one or something was creeping upstairs in the dark!

Familiar with the ghastly media employed by the Chinaman, I was seized by an impulse to leap to the door, shut and lock it. But the rustling sound proceeded now from immediately outside my partially opened door. I had not the time to close it; knowing somewhat of the horrors at the command of Fu-Manchu, I had not the courage to open it. My heart leaping wildly, and my eyes upon that bar of darkness with its gruesome potentialities, I waited—waited for whatever was to come. Perhaps twelve seconds passed in silence.

"Who's there?" I cried. "Answer, or I fire!"

"Ah! no!" came a soft voice, thrillingly musical. "Put it down—that pistol! Quick! I must speak to you!"

The door was pushed open and there entered a slim figure wrapped in a hooded cloak. My hand fell, and I stood, stricken to silence, looking into the beautiful dark eyes of Doctor Fu-Manchu's messenger, if her own statement could be credited, slave. On two occasions this girl, whose association with the doctor was one of the most profound mysteries of the case, had risked—I cannot say what; unnamable punishments perhaps—to save me from death; in both cases from a terrible death.

Her lips slightly parted, she stood holding her cloak about her and watching me with great passionate eyes.

"How—" I began.

But she shook her head impatiently.

"He has a duplicate key of the house door!" was her amazing statement. "I have never betrayed a secret of my master's before, but you must arrange to replace the lock."

She came forward and rested her slim hands confidingly upon my shoulders. "I have come again to ask you to take me away from him!" she said simply.

And she lifted her face to me.

Her words struck a chord in my heart which sang with strange music, with music so barbaric that, frankly, I blushed to find it harmony. Have I said that she was beautiful? It can convey no faint conception of her. With her pure, fair skin, eyes like the velvet darkness of the East, and red lips so tremulously near to mine, she was the most seductively lovely creature I ever had looked upon. In that electric moment my heart went out in sympathy to every man who had bartered honor, country, all for a woman's kiss.

"I will see that you are placed under proper protection," I said firmly, but my voice was not quite my own. "It is absurd to talk of slavery here in England. You are a free agent, or you could not be here now. Doctor Fu-Manchu cannot control your actions—"

"Ah!" she cried, casting back her head scornfully, and releasing a cloud of hair through whose softness gleamed a jeweled headdress—"no? He cannot? Do you know what it means to have been a slave? Here, in your free England, do you know what it means: the razzia, the desert journey, the whips of the drivers, the house of the dealer, the shame—bah!"

How beautiful she was in her indignation!

"Slavery is put down, you imagine, perhaps? You do not believe that today—today—twenty-five English sovereigns will buy a Galla girl, who is brown, and—whisper, two hundred and fifty—a Circassian, who is white! No! there is no slavery! So! Then what am I?"

She threw open her cloak, and it is a literal fact that I rubbed my eyes, half believing that I dreamed. For beneath, she was arrayed in gossamer silk which more than indicated the perfect lines of her slim shape, wore a jeweled girdle and barbaric ornaments; was a figure fit for the walled gardens of Stamboul—a figure amazing, incomprehensible, in the prosaic setting of my rooms!

"Tonight I had no time to make myself an English miss!" she said, wrapping her cloak [illegible] about her. "You see me as I am!"

Her garments exhaled a faint perfume, and it reminded me of another meeting I had had with her. I looked into the challenging eyes.

"Your request is but a pretense," I said. "Why do you keep the secrets of that man when they mean death to so many?"

"Death! I have seen my own sister die of fever in the desert—seen her thrown like a carrion into a hole in the sand! I have seen men flogged until they prayed for death as a boon! I have known the lash myself! Death! What does it matter?"

She shocked me inexpressibly. Enveloped in her cloak again, and with only her slight accent to betray her, it was dreadful to hear such words from a girl who, save for her singular type of beauty, might have been a cultured European.

"Prove, then, that you really wish to leave this man's service. Tell me what killed Strozza and the Chinaman!" I said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not know that. But if you will carry me off"—she clutched me nervously—"so that I am helpless, lock me up so that I cannot escape, beat me if you like, I will tell you all I do know! While he is my master I will never betray him. Tear me from him, by force—do you understand, by force?—and my lips will be sealed no longer! Ah! but you do not understand, with your 'proper authorities'—your police! Police! Ah! I have said enough."

She shivered as if with cold, stepping back and drawing the cloak tightly about her. For my part, I felt hopelessly unable to cope with ideas of so extraordinary a character. I stood silent, amazed. What should I do? Reason with her? Detain her?

A clock across the Common began to strike. The girl started, and laid her hands upon my shoulders again. There were tears glittering among the curved black lashes.

"You do not understand!" she whispered. "Oh! will you never understand—and release me from him! I must go. Already I have remained too long. Listen! Go out—without delay! Remain out—at a hotel, where you will, but do not stay here!"

"And Nayland Smith?"

"What is he to me—this Nayland Smith! Ah! why will you not unseal my lips! You are in danger—you hear me! —in danger! Go away from here tonight."

She dropped her hands and ran from the room. In the open doorway she turned, stamping her foot passionately.

"You have hands and arms!" she cried. "And yet you let me go! Be warned, then; fly from here—" She broke off with something that sounded like a sob.

I made no move to stay her—this beautiful accomplice of the archmurderer, Fu-Manchu. I heard her light footsteps pattering down the stairs; I heard her open and close the door—the door of which Doctor Fu-Manchu held the key. Still I stood where she had parted from me, and was so standing when a key grated in the lock, and Nayland Smith came running up.

"Did you see her?" I began.

But his face showed that he had not done so, and rapidly I told him of my strange visitor, of her words, of her warning.

"How can she have passed through London in that costume?" I cried in bewilderment. "Where can she have come from?"

Smith shrugged his shoulders and began to stuff broadcut mixture into the cracked briar.

"She might have traveled in a car or in a cab," he said, "and undoubtedly she came direct from the house of Doctor Fu-Manchu. You should have detained her, Petrie. It is the third time we have had that woman in our power, the third time we have let her go free."

"Smith," I replied, "I couldn't! She came of her own free will, to give me warning. She disarms me!"

"Because you can see that she is in love with you?" he suggested, and burst into one of his rare laughs when the angry flush rose to my cheek. "She is, Petrie—why pretend to be blind to it? You don't know the Oriental mind as I do; but I quite understand the girl's position. She fears the English authorities, but would submit to capture by you! If you would only seize her by the hair, drag her to some cellar, hurl her down and stand over her with a whip, she would tell you everything she knows, and salve her strange Eastern conscience with the reflection that speech was forced from her! I am not joking; it is so, I assure you. And she would adore you for your savagery, deeming you forceful and strong!"

"Smith," I said, "be serious. You know what her warning meant before?"

"I can guess what it means now!" he rapped. "Hullo!"

Some one was furiously ringing the bell.

"No one at home?" said my friend. "I will go. I think I know what it is."

A few minutes later he returned, carrying a large square package.

"From Weymouth," he explained, "by district messenger," and began to untie the wrappings. "I left him behind at the docks, and he arranged to forward any evidence which subsequently he found. This will be fragments of the missing mummy!"

"What! you think the mummy was abstracted?"

"Yes, at the docks, I am sure of it—and somebody else was in the sarcophagus when it reached Rowan House! A sarcophagus, I find, is practically airtight, so that the use of the rubber stopper becomes evident—ventilation! How this person killed Strozza I have yet to learn—"

"Also, how he escaped from a locked room! And what about the green mist?"

Nayland Smith spread his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"The green mist, Petrie, can be explained in several ways. Remember we have only one man's word that it existed. It is at best a confusing datum to which we must not attach a fictitious importance."

He threw the wrappings on the floor, and tugged at a twine loop in the lid of the square box, which now stood upon the table. Suddenly the lid came away, bringing with it a lead lining such as is usual in tea chests. This lining was partially attached to one side of the box, so that the action of removing the lid at once raised and tilted it.

Then happened a singular thing.

Out over the table billowed a sort of yellowish green cloud—an oily vapor—and an inspiration, it was nothing less, born of a memory and of some words of my beautiful visitor, came to me. And I thank heaven for it.

"Run, Smith!" I screamed—"the door! the door, for your life! Fu-Manchu sent that box!"

I threw my arms around him. As he bent forward, the moving vapor rose almost to his nostrils. I dragged him back and all but pitched him out on the landing. We entered my bedroom, and there, as I turned on the light, I saw that Smith's tanned face was unusually drawn and touched with pallor.

"It's chlorine gas!" I said hoarsely. "Inhalation is deadly. It is the fumes of chlorine that kill the men in the bleaching-powder works! We have been blind!—I, particularly! Don't you see? There was no one in the sarcophagus, Smith, but there was enough of that fearful stuff to have suffocated a regiment!"

Smith clenched his fists convulsively.

"My God!" he said, "how can I hope to deal with the author of such a scheme! I see the whole plan. He did not reckon on the mummy case being overturned, and Kwee's part was to remove the plug with the aid of the string—after Sir Lionel had been suffocated! The gas, I take it, is heavier than air—"

"A specific gravity of 2.470," I said, "two and a half times heavier than air. You can pour it from jar to jar like a liquid—if you are wearing a chemist's mask. The sarcophagus would have emptied through the vent, the gas would have dispersed, and no clue remained—except the smell."

"I did smell it, Petrie, on the stopper, but of course was unfamiliar with it. You may remember that you were prevented from doing so by the arrival of Sir Lionel? The scent of those infernal flowers must partially have drowned it, too. Poor, misguided Strozza inhaled the stuff, capsized the case in his fall, and all the gas—"

"Went pouring under the conservatory door, and down the steps, where Kwee was crouching! Croxted's breaking the window created sufficient draft to disperse what little remained. It will have settled on the floor, now. I will go and open both windows."

Nayland Smith raised his haggard face.

"He evidently made more than was necessary to dispatch Sir Lionel Barton," he said, "and contemptuously—you note the attitude, Petrie?—contemptuously devoted the surplus to me. His contempt is justified. I am a child striving to cope with a mental giant. It is by no wit of mine that Doctor Fu-Manchu scores a double failure."

One week from today "The Call of Siva," the fifth adventure of Nayland Smith and Doctor Petrie in their search for the elusive Chinese crime genius, Fu-Manchu, will be published. In China, Smith had heard the fatal Call of Siva, a low, penetrating wail, always heralding death. Now, in the [illegible] of London, he hears it again. The [illegible] of the oriental fiend is seen by the two searchers at close range—too close range for comfort, in [illegible]