



There's no Coincidence

By Ruth Burr Sanborn

The story of a man who never took a chance, and a girl who did



JOHN TORRENCE MORTIMER BRIDGE stopped at the bank on his way to lunch. He deposited twenty per cent of his salary in the savings department, twenty per cent in his emergency fund, sixty per cent in his checking account. He lunched in a small, clean restaurant where the food was home-cooked. He ordered two glasses of water, a green salad, bran muffins, a baked pear and a glass of milk. He ate slowly, with conscientious chewing, and his expression was less of joy in food than of satisfaction in duty done.

After lunch John Bridge walked briskly—not hurrying, as haste is a strain on the heart—and breathed deeply as he walked; he paused at the crossings to scrutinize the lights.

John Bridge's office was very clean and austere bare. He spent a busy, well-ordered afternoon. He was to start on his vacation the next morning, but he was not one to leave a lot of loose ends until the last minute.

On the train John Bridge saw a girl. The girl had red hair. He did not look at her much, because looking at girls was not part of his scheme of life.

John Bridge's father had lost one fortune at Monte Carlo, one in Wall Street, one in Florida, and had drunk up the fourth; he and his wife were killed in an airplane accident running down to Havana for a cocktail. It was not strange that John Bridge had reacted violently in the direction of security, of caution.

John Bridge's work had still further served to keep before him the consequences of folly. At twenty-four he was head of the city poor department. It was a responsible position for so young a man in so large a city. John Bridge administered his office admirably. He became more and more careful. There were no coincidences in his life.

John Bridge could have told you right then how his life was coming out. He was well protected by insurance: life, illness, disability, accident, unemployment, fire, fever, famine, flood, earthquake and hurricane. He maintained an emergency fund: when it reached five thousand dollars without an emergency having arisen, he invested it in safe securities, widely scattered, and started again. His expenditures were budgeted, and he never ran over his estimates. He had no . . . entanglements.

THIRTY-FIVE, John Bridge had decided, was the age at which he could afford to marry. He knew now what the young woman would be like. There would be nothing extravagant about her, either in taste or appearance; a practical person, with smooth brown hair and gray eyes and good health and no nonsense. He leaned his head against the back of the train seat and closed his eyes; when his eyes were open he could not help seeing the girl with red hair because she was right in front of him.

John Bridge always spent his vaca-

tion at Seabrink, a small hotel on the Maine coast. His idea of a vacation was not an orgy. It was two weeks of rest and relaxation, fresh air, exercise, plain food, sleep.

He arrived at Seabrink just in time for dinner. He had broiled haddock and fresh berries and whole-wheat bread. The girl with red hair had come to Seabrink too. She had cream of mushroom soup, broiled lobster, cheese biscuits, ice cream with fresh berry sauce, fudge cake and coffee. John Bridge marveled that she could do it without spoiling her complexion. Her complexion, however, was not spoiled.

After dinner there was dancing. John Bridge did not often dance. The girl with red hair was dancing, however. She had a dress not quite green, not quite blue, not perhaps quite all there. It was the color of the sea after the sun has left it, but not nearly so soothing to the senses. John Bridge went out and looked at the sea. He looked at the moon tripping over it in silver slippers. He felt, surprisingly, rather tired. Perhaps the year's work had been more of a strain than he realized.

John Bridge rose as usual at six the next morning, and after breakfast he took a five-mile walk along the shore. He was returning by the cliff path when, looking down, he saw a figure lying below him on the sand. It lay as if flung there: legs and arms spread wide, palms up, head back. Clearly there had been an accident.

"Why can't people be careful!" muttered John Bridge. She was hurt; perhaps dead; perhaps drowned. He went scrambling down the rocks. He went running across the sand.

WHEN John Bridge came up to the still figure, he saw that it was the girl with red hair. The discovery gave him rather a shock; it must always be a shock to find, dead, a person whom one has recently seen living. John Bridge was upset. In his work he did not often come in contact with . . . bodies. Of course he should have to make sure. He should have to . . . examine her.

For one dead the girl did not look at all repulsive; John Bridge was surprised at the color in her cheeks. She was not exactly pretty, but she looked pretty, lying there. Her features were not regular—generous mouth, tilted nose, triangular chin with the tuck of laughter in it—but there was a singular purity about their outline, a clearness of chiseling, as if they were meant to be that way and no other. She had the amazing, almost unearthly, fairness that is sometimes seen with red hair. The red hair was shoulder-length and curly; it blew loose, a wild and windy mop, spread across the sand like a big red halo. She wore a pair of bright cotton beach pajamas.

John Bridge leaned down and put his hand on her. She was still warm.

John Bridge knelt, pressed his ear over her heart. Immediately he was aware of a wild, loud pounding. This,

to his confusion, turned out to be his heart, not hers. John Bridge was astounded, even alarmed. He had never had before the least hint of heart trouble. It must have been from running. He moved his ear a little higher.

"Hello," said a bright voice, quivering with laughter. "Did you have a nice nap?"

John Bridge jerked himself onto his hands and knees. It was a sufficiently awkward position for any careful young man to be found in.

"I—I thought you were killed," he stammered.

She was looking at him out of the most amazingly dark blue eyes—practically purple, like the sea at twilight—set deep in a tangle of lashes. There was a world of laughter in that deep blue look.

"I was asleep," she said. "When I woke up you were asleep, too, with your head on my stomach. I hope it made a good pillow."

"It wasn't your stomach," cried John Bridge, confused. The words did not give at all the impression he had intended. "I mean—I was trying to find your heart."

"Really? Quite a romantic notion." "Oh, no," cried John Bridge. "Not that. I mean—I wanted to see if it was going."

"And was it?" she inquired. "Or did it stop short at sight of you?"

"You couldn't see me," John Bridge pointed out logically, "when you were asleep."

"That's right, too," she agreed. "So I couldn't." She swung a bare leg, up which the loose trouser slipped alarm-

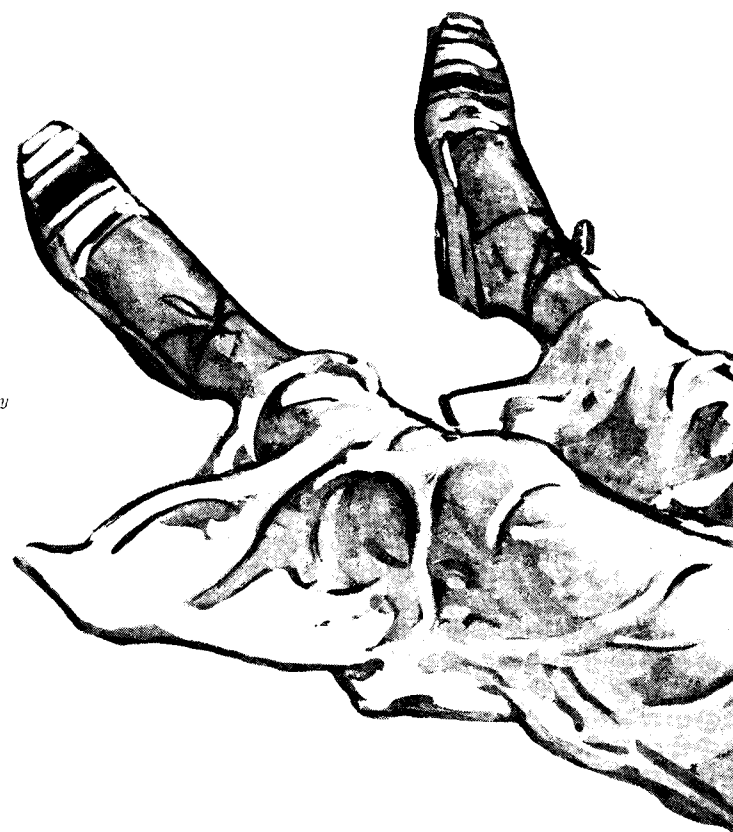
ingly, and rolled over. "I was taking a sun bath," she explained. "I guess it's time to do the other side." She reached up in the most nonchalant way and began to pull down one of the shoulder straps.

"Look out!" cried John Bridge involuntarily. "It'll come down."

THE girl was annoyingly calm. "I don't want a pale spot on my back," she told him. The loose sand moved under her, shaping itself to the curves of her body. She scooped a little hollow in front, and folded her hands, and propped up her chin. "Come around here where I can see you," she said. "I want to know if you're really as disagreeable as you look."

At the moment John Bridge did not, in fact, look disagreeable at all. He looked like a dreadfully embarrassed young man, confronted by a situation with which he was ill prepared to cope. John Bridge was normally 5 feet 11½ inches tall, erect of carriage, incisive of gesture; he had brown hair, well disciplined against a tendency to tip up round the edges; calm, gray eyes; firm lips, and a firmer chin. Now, as he stumbled across the sand, he looked bigger and broader than reason said he could be; he had a harried expression; he had a brilliancy of coloring which had developed too suddenly to be altogether sunburn. The way his hands were crammed into his pockets hinted at a nervous tension which John Bridge would have been the first to deprecate. When he sat down, it was with an effect of collapsing, as if something had given way and let him drop.

Illustrated by
Jay Hyde
Barnum



Even the girl noticed. "You don't look disagreeable just now," she admitted. "But you did last night. Why didn't you come on in and dance?"

"I don't dance much," said John Bridge. For the first time in his life it struck him that this statement called for explanation. "As exercise," he said, "a brisk walk in the open air, a dip in the ocean, even lifting weights..." He broke off short.

THE girl laughed—whole-heartedly tipping back her head. "Who dances for exercise?" she scoffed. "What do you go on a vacation for?"

"Why," said John Bridge, struggling to make a perfectly plain matter even plainer, "to—store up energy for the year's work."

That time she did not laugh. She looked inquiring, puzzled. "Don't you ever do anything for fun?" she asked. "If that is your idea of a vacation, what on earth do you do when you're working?"

"I am administrator of the city department of poor relief," he said stiffly.

The girl sat up then. Bounced up, no less. Mercifully she remembered the shoulderstraps. "How perfectly grand!" she cried. "I've always wanted to meet an administrator of poor relief. You never know when one might come in handy. When I need a soup ticket, will you give me one?"

A great many people had asked John Bridge for soup tickets, but he had never been so painfully embarrassed. "I—I guess it won't be necessary," he stammered.

"It's more than likely," she assured him. "I'm out of work."

The habits of a lifetime are not easily overcome. It was the duty of John Bridge, in his professional capacity, to inquire into the causes of poverty. "Then why," he said, "if you are out of work, are you taking a vacation?"

"That's why, of course," she said.

"But you ought to be looking for another position..." John Bridge was recovering rapidly, now that things were back on a more professional basis.

She moved forward. "Our office had to retrench," she confided, "and I'm

the retrenchment. I had two hundred dollars, so I thought I'd spend it on a vacation and get myself in good shape for starving. It gives so much more conviction to your tone, when you beg the stony-hearted capitalist for work, if you really are starving, instead of being a capitalist yourself, with two hundred dollars in the bank."

John Bridge groaned. This was the type which made his work so hard. Improvident. Irresponsible. Short-sighted. Easy-going... He found himself looking at a diamond pin in her waistband.

"Nice, isn't it?" she said. "It was my grandmother's. I expect I would starve before I'd sell it. It would be like selling my pride."

Well... there you were. Talking about starving. Wearing a fabulous diamond stuck into beach pajamas. Undisciplined. Headstrong. Foolish. Flighty. Proud. The very type that invariably came to want... She was still young, though. Perhaps it was not too late.

"I must talk to you," he said.

"All right," she agreed cheerfully.

"This afternoon. Let's go back to lunch now. Starvation is setting in already."

John Bridge talked to the girl that very afternoon. Her name was Merlin Tallant. There was magic in the name, somehow. John Bridge said so. It was one of several things that he had not intended to mention.

They had gone down to Pinpoint: a long thin line of rock that went pricking into the water; the waves washed across the end and made slow, recurrent punctuation for their speech; there was a continuity about it, a rhythm, that made it easy to go on talking. John Bridge told Merlin more about himself that afternoon—even about his family—than he had ever told anyone. More, perhaps, than he altogether realized.

MERLIN told him about herself too. She was a member of a great, big, impecunious, haphazard family, headed by Father Tallant, who had a genius for buying things. "I believe there isn't anything in the world that Father hasn't bought," Merlin said. "We used to say he had bought everything except a locomotive. And then he bought that. It was quite a joke."

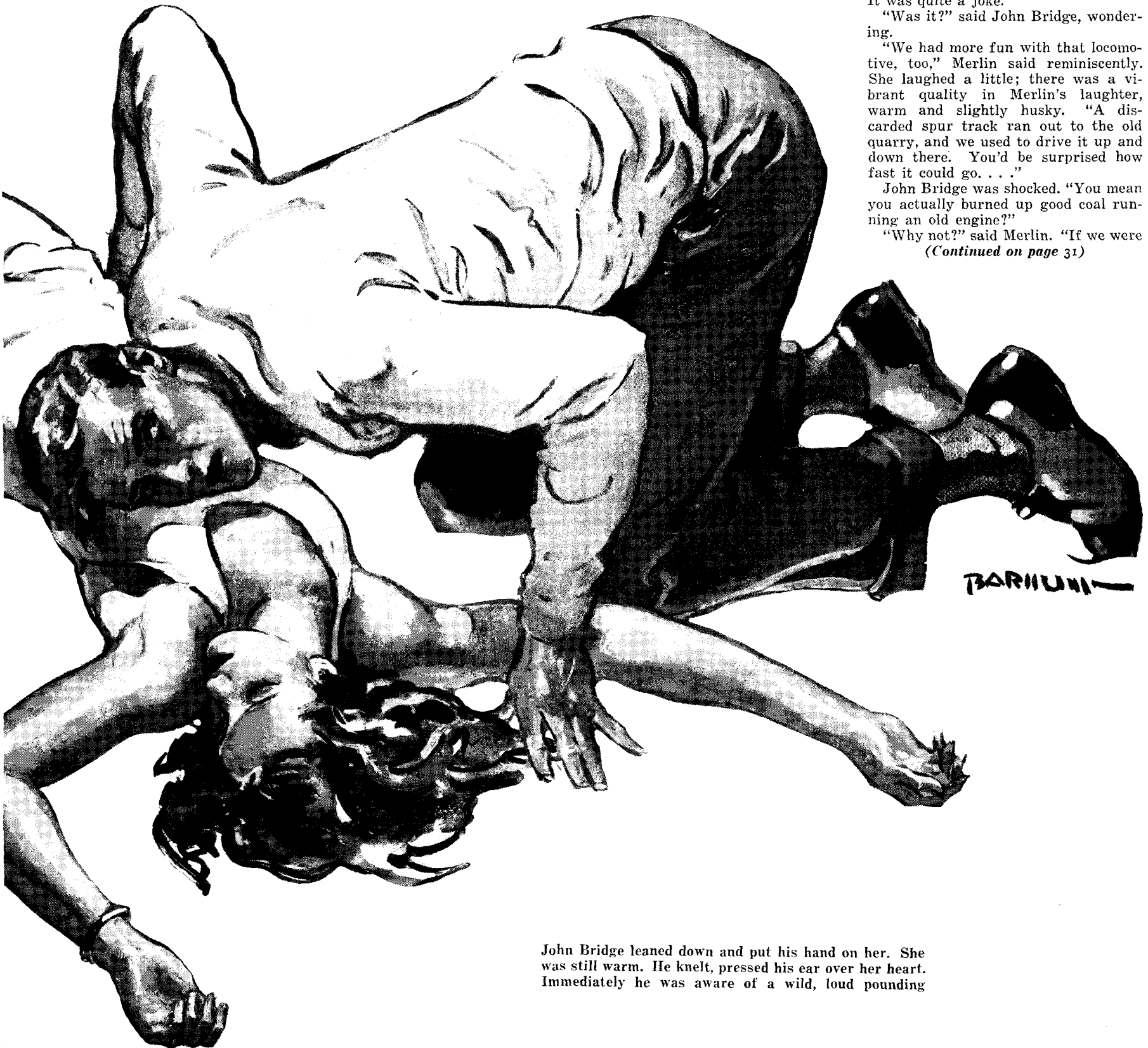
"Was it?" said John Bridge, wondering.

"We had more fun with that locomotive, too," Merlin said reminiscently. She laughed a little; there was a vibrant quality in Merlin's laughter, warm and slightly husky. "A discarded spur track ran out to the old quarry, and we used to drive it up and down there. You'd be surprised how fast it could go..."

John Bridge was shocked. "You mean you actually burned up good coal running an old engine?"

"Why not?" said Merlin. "If we were

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Fu Manchu's Bride

By Sax Rohmer

The Story Thus Far:

A PLAGUE—deadly, mysterious—attacks southern France. One man alone succeeds in evolving an antidote: Dr. Petrie, noted English scientist. But he, too, is stricken; and, his supply of the remedy exhausted, he dies. And the formula for the remedy vanishes! . . . What has become of that formula? Sir Denis Nayland Smith, ex-Scotland Yard operative, and young Alan Sterling (friend of Petrie) learn the answer. It horrifies them, astounds them. The formula has been destroyed by an enemy of mankind—a monster who is striving to terrorize the world: *Dr. Fu Manchu*!

Surrounded by dacoits (Burmese killers in Fu Manchu's employ), Sir Denis and Sterling, in constant peril, have a series of thrilling adventures. Then (while the detective is in Berlin) Sterling is captured by the plotters, rushed to a mysterious establishment—Fu Manchu's laboratory! The "Doctor," an Oriental of great distinction, greets him courteously. Then—"You, Sterling, are now in China. Henceforth you work for me. Come—I will introduce you to my other assistants." And Sterling receives the shock of his life—the "assistants" are famous scientists, *all supposed to be dead!* . . . A weird phantasmagoria, that laboratory. Secret doors lead from one room of wonders to another. And Sterling is shown creations which amaze him: monstrous insects, enormous spiders and creatures which are neither man nor beast! But the wonder of wonders is the flower of "the Orchid of Life"—the oil from which will render man immortal! . . .

A prisoner, Sterling thinks often of a girl. Having met her casually, he knows only that she is beautiful; that she is called "Fleurette"; that she lives in the villa of Ste. Claire de la Roche, on the coast of southern France. But he loves her. Who, he wonders, is she? What has become of her? . . . His questions are answered—in Fu Manchu's stronghold. Fleurette is there! She comes to him. Breathlessly they converse. The girl (so she says) had been adopted, when she was a baby, by Mahdi Bey, an old Arab doctor, who occupies the Ste. Claire de la Roche villa. "I," she whispers, "have been trained for a purpose." Then, as a light, trumpet-like note is heard (the master's method of summoning his servants), she hurries away. . . . From another beautiful woman (Fah Lo Suee, Fu Manchu's fascinating daughter) Sterling learns more of Fleurette—and the doctor's plans. "You," she says, "are in France, not China. Soon my father will start his war on the world. He wants a son. It will be Fleurette's duty to give him one. You love her. I will help you to win her." She leaves Sterling, who, to his amazement, finds Fu Manchu deep in an opium dream—and escapes. It is night. A man comes forward. Nayland Smith! Quickly Sterling narrates his adventures. "Ah," Sir Denis says, "*my theory was right!*"

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WHAT do you mean?" I asked. Nayland Smith was silent for a moment; then—"There was once another woman, Sterling, who under hypnotic direction from Dr. Fu Manchu possessed somewhat similar gifts. The Doctor is probably the most accomplished hypnotist in the world. Many of his discoveries are undoubtedly due to his employment of these powers. And it would seem that there is some mental affinity between this girl's brain and your own."

My heart beat faster as he spoke the words.

"But as to what happened in Berlin: I arrived to find the professor's laboratory in flames!"

"What!"

"The origin of the fire could not be traced. Incendiarism was suspected by the police. Briefly, the place was burned to a shell, in spite of the efforts of the fire brigade. . . . It is feared that the professor was trapped in the flames."

"Dead?"

"At the time of my hurried departure the heat remained too great for any examination of the ruins. But from the moment that Dr. Krus was seen to

enter his laboratory, no one attached to his household ever saw him again."

"Good heavens!" I groaned, "the very gods seem to have been fighting against poor Petrie."

"The gods?" Nayland Smith echoed grimly. "The gods of China—Fu Manchu's China. . . ."

"Whatever do you mean, Sir Denis?"

"The burglary of Sir Manston Rorke's," he rasped, "Sir Manston's sudden death—the fire at Professor Krus' laboratory, and his disappearance: these things are no more coincidences than Fah Lo Suee's visit to the hospital where Petrie lay. Then—something else, which I am going to tell you."

He rested his hand upon my knee and went on rapidly:

"I dashed back to the airdrome—there was nothing more I could do in Berlin. There came a series of unaccountable delays—none of which I could trace to its source. But they were deliberate, Sterling; they were deliberate. Someone was interested in hindering my return. However, ultimately I got away. It was late in the afternoon before I reached the hospital. I had had the news—about Petrie—when I landed, of course."

HE STOPPED for a moment, and I could tell he was clenching his pipe very tightly between his teeth; then:

"As is the custom," he went on, "in cases of pestilence in a hot climate, they had . . . buried him."

I reached out and squeezed his shoulder.

"It hit me very hard, too," I said.

"I know it did. There is a long bill against Dr. Fu Manchu, but you don't know all yet. You see, the history of this brilliant Chinese horror is known to me in considerable detail. Although I didn't doubt your word when you assured me that Fah Lo Suee had not touched Petrie in the hospital, you may recall that I questioned you very closely as to where she was sitting during the greater part of her visit?"

"I do."

"Well!" he paused, taking his pipe from between his teeth and staring at me in the darkness. "She had brought something—probably hidden in a pocket inside her fur cloak—"

"You mean—"

"I mean that she *succeeded* in the purpose of her visit. Yes, Sterling! Oh, no blame attaches to you. That hell-cat is nearly as brilliant an illusionist as her illustrious father. Briefly, when Cartier and Brisson gave me a detailed account of the symptoms which had preceded the end—I was not satisfied."

"Not satisfied with what?"

"You shall hear."

He paused for a moment and grasped my arm.

"Listen!"

We sat there, both listening intently.

"What did you think you heard?" I whispered.

"I am not certain that I heard anything; but it may have been a vague movement on the path. Are you armed?"

"No."

"I am. If I give the word—run for it. I'll bring up the rear. The boat is hidden just under the headland. They will pull in and we can wade out to them."

"Your disappearance on the road from Monte Carlo," Nayland Smith

went on, "puzzled me extraordinarily. The guiding hand behind this business had ceased to be a matter of speculation. I knew that we were dealing with Dr. Fu Manchu. But where you belonged in the scheme was not clear to me. I had urgent personal work to do, necessitating the bringing of pressure to bear on the French authorities. Therefore, I delegated to a local chief of police the task of tracing your movements step by step, on the night of your disappearance."

"This was undertaken with that admirable thoroughness which characterizes police work here, and involved a house-to-house inquiry along many miles of the Corniche road. In the meantime, working unremittingly, I had



secured the powers which I sought. . . . Petrie's grave—a very hurried one—was reopened. . . ."

"What!"

"Yes; it was a pretty ghastly task. In order to perform it in secrecy, we had to close the place and post police upon the roads approaching it. However, it was accomplished at last, and the common coffin in which the interment had taken place was hauled up and laid upon the earth."

"My God!" I groaned.

"I have undertaken some unpleasant duties, Sterling, but the sound of the screws being extracted and the thought that presently—"

He broke off, and sat silent.

"It was done at last," he went on, "and I think I was nearer to fainting than I have ever been in my life. Not from horror, not from sorrow; but because my theory—my eleventh-hour hope—had proved to have a substratum of fact."

"WHAT do you mean, Sir Denis?"

"I mean that Petrie was not in the coffin!"

"Not in the coffin! . . . It was empty?"

"Not at all." He laughed grimly.

"It contained a body right enough. The body of a Burman. The mark of Kali was on his brow—and he had died from a shot wound in the stomach."

"Good heavens! The dacoit who—"

"Exactly, Sterling! Your late friend of the Villa Jasmin, beyond doubt. You will observe that Dr. Fu Manchu finds uses for his servants—dead, as well as living!"

"But this is astounding! What does it mean?"

Quite a long time elapsed before Sir Denis replied:

"I don't dare to hope that it means what I wish it to mean," he said; "but—Petrie was not buried."

I was literally breathless with astonishment, but at last:

"Whenever can so amazing a substitution have taken place?" I asked.

"The very question to which I next applied myself," Nayland Smith replied. "Half an hour's inquiry established the facts. The little mortuary, which I believe you have visited, is not guarded. And his body, hastily encased as I have indicated, lay there throughout the night. The mortuary is a lonely building, as you may remember. For Dr. Fu Manchu's agents such a substitution was a simple matter."

"WHAT do you think?" I broke in.

"I don't dare to tell you what I think—or hope. But Dr. Fu Manchu is the greatest physician the world has ever known. Come on! Let's establish contact with the police boat."

He stood up and began to walk rapidly down to the beach. We had about reached the spot where first I had set eyes upon Fleurette when a boat with two rowers and two men in the stern shot out from shadow into moonlight and was pulled in toward us.

Sir Denis suddenly raised his arm, signaling that they should go about.

I watched the boat swing round, and saw it melt again into the shadows from which it had come. I met the glance of eyes steely in the moonlight.

"An idea has occurred to me," said Sir Denis.

I thought that he watched me strangely.

"If it concerns myself," I replied, "count on me for anything!"



"Good man!"

He clapped his hand on my shoulder.

"Before I mention it, I must bring you up to date. Move back into the shadow."

We walked up the beach and then:

"I checked up on the police reports," he went on. "That dealing with Ste. Claire was the only one which I regarded as unsatisfactory. Ste. Claire, as you probably know, was formerly an extensive monastery; in fact, many of the vineyards in this neighborhood once yielded their produce to the Father Abbot. When the community dispersed, it came into the possession of some noble family whose name I have forgotten. The point of interest and the point which attracted me, was this:

"The place is built on a steep hillside, opening into a deep cleft which we have just negotiated, rather less than a mile in length. The chief building, now known as a villa but a reconstruction of the former monastery, is surrounded by one or two other buildings—and there is a little straggling street. It has been the property for the past fifteen years of a certain wealthy Argentine gentleman, regarding whose