

## CHAPTER 5

"Shen-Yan's is a dope-shop in one of the burrows off the old Ratcliff Highway," said Inspector Weymouth.

"Singapore Charlie's,' they call it. It's a center for some of the Chinese societies, I believe, but all sorts of opium-smokers use it. There have never been any complaints that I know of. I don't understand this."

We stood in his room at New Scotland Yard, bending over a sheet of foolscap upon which were arranged some burned fragments from poor Cadby's grate, for so hurriedly had the girl done her work that combustion had not been complete.

"What do we make of this?" said Smith. "...Hunchback...lascar went up...unlike others...not return...till Shen-Yan' (there is no doubt about the name, I think) `turned me out...booming sound...lascar in...mortuary I could ident...not for days, or suspici...Tuesday night in a different make...snatch...pigtail..."

"The pigtail again!" rapped Weymouth.

"She evidently burned the torn-out pages all together," continued Smith. "They lay flat, and this was in the middle. I see the hand of retributive justice in that, Inspector. Now we have a reference to a hunchback, and what follows amounts to this: A lascar (amongst several other persons) went up somewhere-- presumably upstairs--at Shen-Yan's, and did not come down again. Cadby, who was there disguised, noted a booming sound. Later, he identified the lascar in some mortuary. We have no means of fixing the date of this visit to Shen-Yan's, but I feel inclined to put down the `lascar' as the dacoit who was murdered by Fu-Manchu! It is sheer supposition, however. But that Cadby meant to pay another visit to the place in a different `make-up' or disguise, is evident, and that the Tuesday night proposed was last night is a reasonable deduction. The reference to a pigtail is principally interesting because of what was found on Cadby's body."

Inspector Weymouth nodded affirmatively, and Smith glanced at his watch.

"Exactly ten-twenty-three," he said. "I will trouble you, Inspector, for the freedom of your fancy wardrobe. There is time to spend an hour in the company of Shen-Yan's opium friends."

Weymouth raised his eyebrows.

"It might be risky. What about an official visit?"

Nayland Smith laughed.

"Worse than useless! By your own showing, the place is open to inspection. No; guile against guile! We are dealing with a Chinaman, with the incarnate essence of Eastern subtlety, with the most stupendous genius that the modern Orient has produced."

"I don't believe in disguises," said Weymouth, with a certain truculence. "It's mostly played out, that game, and generally leads to failure. Still, if you're determined, sir, there's an end of it. Foster will make your face up. What disguise do you propose to adopt?"

"A sort of Dago seaman, I think; something like poor Cadby. I can rely on my knowledge of the brutes, if I am sure of my disguise."

"You are forgetting me, Smith," I said.

He turned to me quickly.

"Petrie," he replied, "it is MY business, unfortunately, but it is no sort of hobby."

"You mean that you can no longer rely upon me?" I said angrily.

Smith grasped my hand, and met my rather frigid stare with a look of real concern on his gaunt, bronzed face.

"My dear old chap," he answered, "that was really unkind. You know that I meant something totally different."

"It's all right, Smith;" I said, immediately ashamed of my choler, and wrung his hand heartily. "I can pretend to smoke opium as well as another. I shall be going, too, Inspector."

As a result of this little passage of words, some twenty minutes later two dangerous-looking seafaring ruffians entered a waiting cab, accompanied by Inspector Weymouth, and were driven off into the wilderness of London's night. In this theatrical business there was, to my mind, something ridiculous--almost childish-- and I could have laughed heartily had it not been that grim tragedy lurked so near to farce.

The mere recollection that somewhere at our journey's end Fu-Manchu awaited us was sufficient to sober my reflections--Fu-Manchu, who, with all the powers represented by Nayland Smith pitted against him, pursued his dark schemes triumphantly, and lurked in hiding within this very area which was so sedulously patrolled--Fu-Manchu, whom I had never seen, but whose name stood for horrors indefinable! Perhaps I was destined to meet the terrible Chinese doctor to-night.

I ceased to pursue a train of thought which promised to lead to morbid depths, and directed my attention to what Smith was saying.

"We will drop down from Wapping and reconnoiter, as you say the place is close to the riverside. Then you can put us ashore somewhere below. Ryman can keep the launch close to the back of the premises, and your fellows will be hanging about near the front, near enough to hear the whistle."

"Yes," assented Weymouth; "I've arranged for that. If you are suspected, you shall give the alarm?"

"I don't know," said Smith thoughtfully. "Even in that event I might wait awhile."

"Don't wait too long," advised the Inspector. "We shouldn't be much wiser if your next appearance was on the end of a grapnel, somewhere down Greenwich Reach, with half your fingers missing."

The cab pulled up outside the river police depot, and Smith and I entered without delay, four shabby-looking fellows who had been seated in the office springing up to salute the Inspector, who followed us in.

"Guthrie and Lisle," he said briskly, "get along and find a dark corner which commands the door of Singapore Charlie's off the old Highway. You look the dirtiest of the troupe, Guthrie; you might drop asleep on the pavement, and Lisle can argue with you about getting home. Don't move till you hear the whistle inside or have my orders, and note everybody that goes in and comes out. You other two belong to this division?"

The C.I.D. men having departed, the remaining pair saluted again.

"Well, you're on special duty to-night. You've been prompt, but don't stick your chests out so much. Do you know of a back way to Shen-Yan's?"

The men looked at one another, and both shook their heads.

"There's an empty shop nearly opposite, sir," replied one of them. "I know a broken window at the back where we could climb in. Then we could get through to the front and watch from there."

"Good!" cried the Inspector. "See you are not spotted, though; and if you hear the whistle, don't mind doing a bit of damage, but be inside Shen-Yan's like lightning. Otherwise, wait for orders."

Inspector Ryman came in, glancing at the clock.

"Launch is waiting," he said.

"Right," replied Smith thoughtfully. "I am half afraid, though, that the recent alarms may have scared our quarry--your man, Mason, and then Cadby. Against which we have that, so far as he is likely to know, there has been no clew pointing to this opium den. Remember, he thinks Cadby's notes are destroyed."

"The whole business is an utter mystery to me," confessed Ryman. "I'm told that there's some dangerous Chinese devil hiding somewhere in London, and that you expect to find him at Shen-Yan's. Supposing he uses that place, which is possible, how do you know he's there to-night?"

"I don't," said Smith; "but it is the first clew we have had pointing to one of his haunts, and time means precious lives where Dr. Fu-Manchu is concerned."

"Who is he, sir, exactly, this Dr. Fu-Manchu?"

"I have only the vaguest idea, Inspector; but he is no ordinary criminal. He is the greatest genius which the powers of evil have put on earth for centuries. He has the backing of a political group whose wealth is enormous, and his mission in Europe is to PAVE THE WAY! Do you follow me? He is the advance-agent of a movement so epoch-making that not one Britisher, and not one American, in fifty thousand has ever dreamed of it."

Ryman stared, but made no reply, and we went out, passing down to the breakwater and boarding the waiting launch. With her crew of three, the party numbered seven that swung out into the Pool, and, clearing the pier, drew in again and hugged the murky shore.

The night had been clear enough hitherto, but now came scudding rainbanks to curtain the crescent moon, and anon to unveil her again and show the muddy swirls about us. The view was not extensive from the launch. Sometimes a deepening of the near shadows would tell of a moored barge, or lights high above our heads mark the deck of a large vessel. In the floods of moonlight gaunt shapes towered above; in the ensuing darkness only the oily glitter of the tide occupied the foreground of the night-piece.

The Surrey shore was a broken wall of blackness, patched with lights about which moved hazy suggestions of human activity. The bank we were following offered a prospect even more gloomy-- a dense, dark mass, amid which, sometimes, mysterious half-tones told of a dock gate, or sudden high lights leapt flaring to the eye.

Then, out of the mystery ahead, a green light grew and crept down upon us. A giant shape loomed up, and frowned crushingly upon the little craft. A blaze of light, the jangle of a bell, and it was past. We were dancing in the wash of one of the Scotch steamers, and the murk had fallen again.

Discords of remote activity rose above the more intimate throbbing of our screw, and we seemed a pigmy company floating past the workshops of Brobdingnagian toilers. The chill of the

near water communicated itself to me, and I felt the protection of my shabby garments inadequate against it.

Far over on the Surrey shore a blue light--vaporous, mysterious-- flicked translucent tongues against the night's curtain. It was a weird, elusive flame, leaping, wavering, magically changing from blue to a yellowed violet, rising, falling.

"Only a gasworks," came Smith's voice, and I knew that he, too, had been watching those elfin fires. "But it always reminds me of a Mexican teocalli, and the altar of sacrifice."

The simile was apt, but gruesome. I thought of Dr. Fu-Manchu and the severed fingers, and could not repress a shudder.

"On your left, past the wooden pier! Not where the lamp is-- beyond that; next to the dark, square building--Shen-Yan's."

It was Inspector Ryman speaking.

"Drop us somewhere handy, then," replied Smith, "and lie close in, with your ears wide open. We may have to run for it, so don't go far away."

From the tone of his voice I knew that the night mystery of the Thames had claimed at least one other victim.

"Dead slow," came Ryman's order. "We'll put in to the Stone Stairs."

## CHAPTER 6

A SEEMINGLY drunken voice was droning from a neighboring alleyway as Smith lurched in hulking fashion to the door of a little shop above which, crudely painted, were the words:

**"SHEN-YAN, BARBER."**

I shuffled along behind him, and had time to note the box of studs, German shaving tackle and rolls of twist which lay untidily in the window ere Smith kicked the door open, clattered down three wooden steps, and pulled himself up with a jerk, seizing my arm for support.

We stood in a bare and very dirty room, which could only claim kinship with a civilized shaving-saloon by virtue of the grimy towel thrown across the back of the solitary chair. A Yiddish theatrical bill of some kind, illustrated, adorned one of the walls, and another bill, in what may have been Chinese, completed the decorations. From behind a curtain heavily brocaded with filth a little Chinaman appeared, dressed in a loose smock, black trousers and thick-soled slippers, and, advancing, shook his head vigorously.

"No shavee--no shavee," he chattered, simian fashion, squinting from one to the other of us with his twinkling eyes. "Too late! Shuttee shop!"

"Don't you come none of it wi' me!" roared Smith, in a voice of amazing gruffness, and shook an artificially dirtied fist under the Chinaman's nose. "Get inside and gimme an' my mate a couple o' pipes. Smokee pipe, you yellow scum--savvy?"

My friend bent forward and glared into the other's eyes with a vindictiveness that amazed me, unfamiliar as I was with this form of gentle persuasion.

"Kop 'old o' that," he said, and thrust a coin into the Chinaman's yellow paw. "Keep me waitin' an' I'll pull the dam' shop down, Charlie. You can lay to it."

"No hab got pipee--" began the other.

Smith raised his fist, and Yan capitulated.

"Allee lightee," he said. "Full up--no loom. You come see."

He dived behind the dirty curtain, Smith and I following, and ran up a dark stair. The next moment I found myself in an atmosphere which was literally poisonous. It was all but unbreathable, being loaded with opium fumes. Never before had I experienced anything like it. Every breath was an effort. A tin oil-lamp on a box in the middle of the floor dimly illuminated the horrible place, about the walls of which ten or twelve bunks were ranged and all of them occupied. Most of the occupants were lying motionless, but one or two were squatting in their bunks noisily sucking at the little metal pipes. These had not yet attained to the opium-smoker's Nirvana.

"No loom--samee tella you," said Shen-Yan, complacently testing Smith's shilling with his yellow, decayed teeth.

Smith walked to a corner and dropped cross-legged, on the floor, pulling me down with him.

"Two pipe quick," he said. "Plenty room. Two piecee pipe-- or plenty heap trouble."

A dreary voice from one of the bunks came:

"Give 'im a pipe, Charlie, curse yer! an' stop 'is palaver."

Yan performed a curious little shrug, rather of the back than of the shoulders, and shuffled to the box which bore the smoky lamp. Holding a needle in the flame, he dipped it, when red-hot, into an old cocoa tin, and withdrew it with a bead of opium adhering to the end. Slowly roasting this over the lamp, he dropped it into the bowl of the metal pipe which he held ready, where it burned with a spirituous blue flame.

"Pass it over," said Smith huskily, and rose on his knees with the assumed eagerness of a slave to the drug.

Yan handed him the pipe, which he promptly put to his lips, and prepared another for me.

"Whatever you do, don't inhale any," came Smith's whispered injunction.

It was with a sense of nausea greater even than that occasioned by the disgusting atmosphere of the den that I took the pipe and pretended to smoke. Taking my cue from my friend, I allowed my head gradually to sink lower and lower, until, within a few minutes, I sprawled sideways on the floor, Smith lying close beside me.

"The ship's sinkin'," droned a voice from one of the bunks. "Look at the rats."

Yan had noiselessly withdrawn, and I experienced a curious sense of isolation from my fellows--from the whole of the Western world. My throat was parched with the fumes, my head ached. The vicious atmosphere seemed contaminating. I was as one dropped--

Somewhere East of Suez, where the best is like the worst, And there ain't no Ten Commandments and a man can raise a thirst.

Smith began to whisper softly.

"We have carried it through successfully so far," he said. "I don't know if you have observed it, but there is a stair just behind you, half concealed by a ragged curtain. We are near that, and well in the dark. I have seen nothing suspicious so far--or nothing much. But if there was anything going forward it would no doubt be delayed until we new arrivals were well doped. S-SH!"

He pressed my arm to emphasize the warning. Through my half-closed eyes I perceived a shadowy form near the curtain to which he had referred. I lay like a log, but my muscles were tensed nervously.

The shadow materialized as the figure moved forward into the room with a curiously lithe movement.

The smoky lamp in the middle of the place afforded scant illumination, serving only to indicate sprawling shapes-- here an extended hand, brown or yellow, there a sketchy, corpse-like face; whilst from all about rose obscene sighs and murmurings in far-away voices--an uncanny, animal chorus. It was like a glimpse of the Inferno seen by some Chinese Dante. But so close to us stood the newcomer that I was able to make out a ghastly parchment face, with small, oblique eyes, and a misshapen head crowned with a coiled pigtail, surmounting a slight, hunched body. There was something unnatural, inhuman, about that masklike face, and something repulsive in the bent shape and the long, yellow hands clasped one upon the other.

Fu-Manchu, from Smith's account, in no way resembled this crouching apparition with the death's-head countenance and lithe movements; but an instinct of some kind told me that we were on the right scent-- that this was one of the doctor's servants. How I came to that conclusion, I cannot explain; but with no doubt in my mind that this was a member of the formidable murder group, I saw the yellow man creep nearer, nearer, silently, bent and peering.

He was watching us.

Of another circumstance I became aware, and a disquieting circumstance. There were fewer murmurings and sighings from the surrounding bunks. The presence of the crouching figure had created a sudden semi-silence in the den, which could only mean that some of the supposed opium-smokers had merely feigned coma and the approach of coma.

Nayland Smith lay like a dead man, and trusting to the darkness, I, too, lay prone and still, but watched the evil face bending lower and lower, until it came within a few inches of my own. I completely closed my eyes.

Delicate fingers touched my right eyelid. Divining what was coming, I rolled my eyes up, as the lid was adroitly lifted and lowered again. The man moved away.

I had saved the situation! And noting anew the hush about me-- a hush in which I fancied many pairs of ears listened--I was glad. For just a moment I realized fully how, with the place watched back and front, we yet were cut off, were in the hands of Far Easterns, to some extent in the power of members of that most inscrutably mysterious race, the Chinese.

"Good," whispered Smith at my side. "I don't think I could have done it. He took me on trust after that. My God! what an awful face. Petrie, it's the hunchback of Cadby's notes. Ah, I thought so. Do you see that?"

I turned my eyes round as far as was possible. A man had scrambled down from one of the bunks and was following the bent figure across the room.

They passed around us quietly, the little yellow man leading, with his curious, lithe gait, and the other, an impassive Chinaman, following. The curtain was raised, and I heard footsteps receding on the stairs.

"Don't stir," whispered Smith.

An intense excitement was clearly upon him, and he communicated it to me. Who was the occupant of the room above?

Footsteps on the stair, and the Chinaman reappeared, recrossed the floor, and went out. The little, bent man went over to another bunk, this time leading up the stair one who looked like a lascar.

"Did you see his right hand?" whispered Smith. "A dacoit! They come here to report and to take orders. Petrie, Dr. Fu-Manchu is up there."

"What shall we do?"--softly.

"Wait. Then we must try to rush the stairs. It would be futile to bring in the police first. He is sure to have some other exit. I will give the word while the little yellow devil is down here. You are nearer and will have to go first, but if the hunchback follows, I can then deal with him."

Our whispered colloquy was interrupted by the return of the dacoit, who recrossed the room as the Chinaman had done, and immediately took his departure. A third man, whom Smith identified as a Malay, ascended the mysterious stairs, descended, and went out; and a fourth, whose nationality it was impossible to determine, followed. Then, as the softly moving usher crossed to a bunk on the right of the outer door--

"Up you go, Petrie," cried Smith, for further delay was dangerous and further dissimulation useless.

I leaped to my feet. Snatching my revolver from the pocket of the rough jacket I wore, I bounded to the stair and went blundering up in complete darkness. A chorus of brutish cries clamored from behind, with a muffled scream rising above them all. But Nayland Smith was

close behind as I raced along a covered gangway, in a purer air, and at my heels when I crashed open a door at the end and almost fell into the room beyond.

What I saw were merely a dirty table, with some odds and ends upon it of which I was too excited to take note, an oil-lamp swung by a brass chain above, and a man sitting behind the table. But from the moment that my gaze rested upon the one who sat there, I think if the place had been an Aladdin's palace I should have had no eyes for any of its wonders.

He wore a plain yellow robe, of a hue almost identical with that of his smooth, hairless countenance. His hands were large, long and bony, and he held them knuckles upward, and rested his pointed chin upon their thinness. He had a great, high brow, crowned with sparse, neutral-colored hair.

Of his face, as it looked out at me over the dirty table, I despair of writing convincingly. It was that of an archangel of evil, and it was wholly dominated by the most uncanny eyes that ever reflected a human soul, for they were narrow and long, very slightly oblique, and of a brilliant green. But their unique horror lay in a certain filminess (it made me think of the membrana nictitans in a bird) which, obscuring them as I threw wide the door, seemed to lift as I actually passed the threshold, revealing the eyes in all their brilliant iridescence.

I know that I stopped dead, one foot within the room, for the malignant force of the man was something surpassing my experience. He was surprised by this sudden intrusion--yes, but no trace of fear showed upon that wonderful face, only a sort of pitying contempt. And, as I paused, he rose slowly to his feet, never removing his gaze from mine.

"IT'S FU-MANCHU!" cried Smith over my shoulder, in a voice that was almost a scream. "IT'S FU-MANCHU! Cover him! Shoot him dead if--"

The conclusion of that sentence I never heard.

Dr. Fu-Manchu reached down beside the table, and the floor slipped from under me.

One last glimpse I had of the fixed green eyes, and with a scream I was unable to repress I dropped, dropped, dropped, and plunged into icy water, which closed over my head.

Vaguely I had seen a spurt of flame, had heard another cry following my own, a booming sound (the trap), the flat note of a police whistle. But when I rose to the surface impenetrable darkness enveloped me; I was spitting filthy, oily liquid from my mouth, and fighting down the black terror that had me by the throat--terror of the darkness about me, of the unknown depths beneath me, of the pit into which I was cast amid stifling stenches and the lapping of tidal water.

"Smith!" I cried..."Help! Help!"

My voice seemed to beat back upon me, yet I was about to cry out again, when, mustering all my presence of mind and all my failing courage, I recognized that I had better employment of my energies, and began to swim straight ahead, desperately determined to face all the horrors of this place--to die hard if die I must.

A drop of liquid fire fell through the darkness and hissed into the water beside me!

I felt that, despite my resolution, I was going mad.

Another fiery drop--and another!

I touched a rotting wooden post and slimy timbers. I had reached one bound of my watery prison. More fire fell from above, and the scream of hysteria quivered, unuttered, in my throat.

Keeping myself afloat with increasing difficulty in my heavy garments, I threw my head back and raised my eyes.

No more drops fell, and no more drops would fall; but it was merely a question of time for the floor to collapse. For it was beginning to emit a dull, red glow.

The room above me was in flames!

It was drops of burning oil from the lamp, finding passage through the cracks in the crazy flooring, which had fallen about me-- for the death trap had reclosed, I suppose, mechanically.

My saturated garments were dragging me down, and now I could hear the flames hungrily eating into the ancient rottenness overhead. Shortly that cauldron would be loosed upon my head. The glow of the flames grew brighter. . .and showed me the half-rotten piles upholding the building, showed me the tidal mark upon the slime-coated walls-- showed me that there was no escape!

By some subterranean duct the foul place was fed from the Thames. By that duct, with the outgoing tide, my body would pass, in the wake of Mason, Cadby, and many another victim!

Rusty iron rungs were affixed to one of the walls communicating with a trap-- but the bottom three were missing!

Brighter and brighter grew the awesome light the light of what should be my funeral pyre--reddening the oily water and adding a new dread to the whispering, clammy horror of the pit. But something it showed me. . .a projecting beam a few feet above the water. . .and directly below the iron ladder!

"Merciful Heaven!" I breathed. "Have I the strength?"

A desire for laughter claimed me with sudden, all but irresistible force. I knew what it portended and fought it down--grimly, sternly.

My garments weighed upon me like a suit of mail; with my chest aching dully, my veins throbbing to bursting, I forced tired muscles to work, and, every stroke an agony, approached the beam. Nearer I swam. . .nearer. Its shadow fell black upon the water, which now had all the seeming of a pool of blood. Confused sounds--a remote uproar--came to my ears. I was nearly spent. . .I was in the shadow of the beam! If I could throw up one arm. . .

A shrill scream sounded far above me!

"Petrie! Petrie!" (That voice must be Smith's!) "Don't touch the beam! For God's sake DON'T TOUCH THE BEAM! Keep afloat another few seconds and I can get to you!"

Another few seconds! Was that possible?

I managed to turn, to raise my throbbing head; and I saw the strangest sight which that night yet had offered.

Nayland Smith stood upon the lowest iron rung...supported by the hideous, crook-backed Chinaman, who stood upon the rung above!

"I can't reach him!"

It was as Smith hissed the words despairingly that I looked up-- and saw the Chinaman snatch at his coiled pigtail and pull it off! With it came the wig to which it was attached; and the ghastly yellow mask, deprived of its fastenings, fell from position! "Here! Here! Be quick! Oh! Be quick! You can lower this to him! Be quick! Be quick!"

A cloud of hair came falling about the slim shoulders as the speaker bent to pass this strange lifeline to Smith; and I think it was my wonder at knowing her for the girl whom that day I had surprised in Cadby's rooms which saved my life.

For I not only kept afloat, but kept my gaze upturned to that beautiful, flushed face, and my eyes fixed upon hers--which were wild with fear...for me!

Smith, by some contortion, got the false queue into my grasp, and I, with the strength of desperation, by that means seized hold upon the lowest rung. With my friend's arm round me I realized that exhaustion was even nearer than I had supposed. My last distinct memory is of the bursting of the floor above and the big burning joist hissing into the pool beneath us. Its fiery passage, striated with light, disclosed two sword blades, riveted, edges up along the top of the beam which I had striven to reach.

"The severed fingers--" I said; and swooned.

How Smith got me through the trap I do not know--nor how we made our way through the smoke and flames of the narrow passage it opened upon. My next recollection is of sitting up, with my friend's arm supporting me and Inspector Ryman holding a glass to my lips.

A bright glare dazzled my eyes. A crowd surged about us, and a clangor and shouting drew momentarily nearer.

"It's the engines coming," explained Smith, seeing my bewilderment. "Shen-Yan's is in flames. It was your shot, as you fell through the trap, broke the oil-lamp."

"Is everybody out?"

"So far as we know."

"Fu-Manchu?"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"No one has seen him. There was some door at the back--"

"Do you think he may--"

"No," he said tensely. "Not until I see him lying dead before me shall I believe it."

Then memory resumed its sway. I struggled to my feet.

"Smith, where is she?" I cried. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"She's given us the slip, Doctor," said Inspector Weymouth, as a fire-engine came swinging round the corner of the narrow lane. "So has Mr. Singapore Charlie--and, I'm afraid, somebody else. We've got six or eight all-sorts, some awake and some asleep, but I suppose we shall have to let 'em go again. Mr. Smith tells me that the girl was disguised as a Chinaman. I expect that's why she managed to slip away."

I recalled how I had been dragged from the pit by the false queue, how the strange discovery which had brought death to poor Cadby had brought life to me, and I seemed to remember, too, that Smith had dropped it as he threw his arm about me on the ladder. Her mask the girl might have retained, but her wig, I felt certain, had been dropped into the water.

It was later that night, when the brigade still were playing, upon the blackened shell of what had been Shen-Yan's opium-shop, and Smith and I were speeding away in a cab from the scene of God knows how many crimes, that I had an idea.

"Smith," I said, "did you bring the pigtail with you that was found on Cadby?"

"Yes. I had hoped to meet the owner."

"Have you got it now?"

"No. I met the owner."

I thrust my hands deep into the pockets of the big pea-jacket lent to me by Inspector Ryman, leaning back in my corner.

"We shall never really excel at this business," continued Nayland Smith. "We are far too sentimental. I knew what it meant to us, Petrie, what it meant to the world, but I hadn't the heart. I owed her your life--I had to square the account."