KERRY'S KID

Sax Rohmer

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I. RED KERRY ON DUTY

Chief Inspector Kerry came down from the top of a motor−bus and stood on the sidewalk for a while gazing to right and left along Piccadilly. The night was, humid and misty, now threatening fog and now rain. Many travellers were abroad at this Christmas season, the pleasure seekers easily to be distinguished from those whom business had detained in town, and who hurried toward their various firesides. The theatres were disgorging their audiences. Streams of lighted cars bore parties supperward; less pretentious taxicabs formed links in the chain.

From the little huddled crowd of more economical theatre−goers who waited at the stopping place of the motor−buses, Kerry detached himself, walking slowly along westward and staring reflectively about him. Opposite the corner of Bond Street he stood still, swinging his malacca cane and gazing fixedly along this narrow bazaar street of the Baghdad of the West. His trim, athletic figure was muffled in a big, double−breasted, woolly overcoat, the collar turned up about his ears. His neat bowler hat was tilted forward so as to shade the fierce blue eyes. Indeed, in that imperfect light, little of the Chief Inspector's countenance was visible except his large, gleaming white teeth, which he constantly revealed in the act of industriously chewing mint gum.

He smiled as he chewed. Duty had called him out into the midst, and for once he had obeyed reluctantly. That very afternoon had seen the return of Dan Kerry, junior, home from school for the Christmas vacation, and Dan was the apple of his father's eye.

Mrs. Kerry had reserved her dour Scottish comments upon the boy's school report for a more seemly occasion than the first day of his holidays; but Kerry had made no attempt to conceal his jubilation almost immoral, his wife had declared it to be respecting the lad's athletic record. His work on the junior left wing had gained the commendation of a celebrated international; and Kerry, who had interviewed the gymnasium instructor, had learned that Dan Junior bade fair to become an amateur boxer of distinction.

"He is faster on his feet than any boy I ever handled," the expert had declared. "He hasn't got the weight behind it yet, of course, but he's developing a left that's going to make history. I'm of opinion that there isn't a boy in the seniors can take him on, and I'll say that he's a credit to you."

Those words had fallen more sweetly upon the ears of Chief Inspector Kerry than any encomium of the boy's learning could have done. On the purely scholastic side his report was not a good one, admittedly. "But," murmured Kerry aloud, "he's going to be a man."

He remembered that he had promised, despite the lateness of the hour, to telephone the lad directly he had received a certain report, and to tell him whether he might wait up for his return or whether he must turn in. Kerry, stamping his small, neatly shod feet upon the pavement, smiled agreeably. He was thinking of the telephone which recently he had had installed in his house in Brixton. His wife had demanded this as a Christmas box, pointing out how many uneasy hours she would be spared by the installation. Kerry had consented cheerfully enough, for was he not shortly to be promoted to the exalted post of a superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department?

These reflections were cheering and warming; and, waiting until a gap occurred in the stream of cabs and cars, he crossed Piccadilly and proceeded along Bond Street, swinging his shoulders in a manner which would have enabled any constable in the force to recognize "Red Kerry" at a hundred yards.

The fierce eyes scrutinized the occupants of all the lighted cars. At pedestrians also he stared curiously, and at another smaller group of travellers waiting for the buses on the left− hand side of the street he looked hard and long. He pursued his way, acknowledged the salutation of a porter who stood outside the entrance to the Embassy Club, and proceeded, glancing about him right and left and with some evident and definite purpose.

A constable standing at the corner of Conduit Street touched his helmet as Kerry passed and the light of an arc−lamp revealed the fierce red face. The Chief Inspector stopped, turned, and:

"What the devil's the idea?" he demanded.

He snapped out the words in such fashion that the unfortunate constable almost believed he could see sparks in the misty air.

"I'm sorry, sir, but recognizing you suddenly like, I "

"You did?" the fierce voice interrupted. "How long in the force?"

"Six months, sir."

"Never salute an officer in plain clothes."

"I know, sir."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I told you, sir."

"Then tell me again."

"I forgot."

"You're paid to remember; bear it in mind."

Kerry tucked his malacca under his arm and walked on, leaving the unfortunate policeman literally stupefied by his first encounter with the celebrated Chief Inspector.

Presently another line of cars proclaimed the entrance to a club, and just before reaching the first of these Kerry paused. A man stood in a shadowy doorway, and:

"Good evening, Chief Inspector," he said quietly.

"Good evening, Durham. Anything to report?"

"Yes. Lou Chada is here again.

"With whom?"

"Lady Rourke."

Kerry stepped to the edge of the pavement and spat out a piece of chewing−gum. From his overcoat pocket he drew a fresh piece, tore off the pink wrapping and placed the gum between his teeth. Then:

"How long?" he demanded.

"Came to dinner. They are dancing."

"H'm!" The Chief Inspector ranged himself beside the other detective in the shadow of the doorway. "Something's brewing, Durham," he said. "I think I shall wait."

His subordinate stared curiously but made no reply. He was not wholly in his chief's confidence. He merely knew that the name of Lou Chada to Kerry was like a red rag to a bull. The handsome, cultured young Eurasian, fresh from a distinguished university career and pampered by a certain section of smart society, did not conform to Detective Sergeant Durham's idea of a suspect. He knew that Lou was the son of Zani Chada, and he knew that Zani Chada was one of the wealthiest men in Limehouse. But Lou had an expensive flat in George Street; Lou was courted by society butterflies, and in what way he could be connected with the case known as "the Limehouse inquiry," Durham could not imagine.

That the open indiscretion of Lady "Pat" Rourke might lead to trouble with her husband, was conceivable enough; but this was rather a matter for underhand private inquiry than for the attention of the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard.

So mused Durham, standing cold and uncomfortable in the shadowy doorway, and dreaming of a certain cosy fireside, a pair of carpet slippers and a glass of hot toddy which awaited him. Suddenly:

"Great flames! Look!" he cried.

Kerry's fingers closed, steely, upon Durham's wrist. A porter was urgently moving the parked cars farther along the street to enable one, a French coupe, to draw up before the club entrance.

Two men came out, supporting between them a woman who seemed to be ill; a slender, blonde woman whose pretty face was pale and whose wide−open blue eyes stared strangely straight before her. The taller of her escorts, while continuing to support her, solicitously wrapped her fur cloak about her bare shoulders; the other, the

manager of the club, stepped forward and opened the door of the car.

"Lady Rourke!" whispered Durham.

"With Lou Chada!" rapped Kerry. "Run for a cab. Brisk. Don't waste a second."

Some little conversation ensued between manager and patron, then the tall, handsome Eurasian, waving his hand protestingly, removed his hat and stepped into the coupe beside Lady Rourke. It immediately moved away in the direction of Piccadilly.

One glimpse Kerry had of the pretty, fair head lying limply back against the cushions. The manager of the club was staring after the car.

Kerry stepped out from his hiding place. Durham had disappeared, and there was no cab in sight, but immediately beyond the illuminated entrance stood a Rolls−Royce which had been fifth in the rank of parked cars before the adjustment had been made to enable the coupe to reach the door. Kerry ran across, and:

"Whose car, my lad?" he demanded of the chauffeur.

The latter, resenting the curt tone of the inquiry, looked the speaker up and down, and:

"Captain. Egerton's," he replied slowly. "But what business may it be of yours?"

"I'm Chief Inspector Kerry, of New Scotland Yard," came the rapid reply. "I want to follow the car that has just left."

"What about running?" demanded the man insolently.

Kerry shot out a small, muscular hand and grasped the speaker's wrist.

"I'll say one thing to you," he rapped. "I'm a police officer, and I demand your help. Refuse it, and you'll wake up in Vine Street."

The Chief Inspector was on the step now, bending forward so that his fierce red face was but an inch removed from that of the startled chauffeur. The quelling force of his ferocious personality achieved its purpose, as it rarely failed to do.

"I'm getting in," added the Chief Inspector, jumping back on to the pavement. "Lose that French bus, and I'll charge you with resisting and obstructing an officer of the law in the execution of his duty. Start."

Kerry leaped in and banged the door and the Rolls−Royce started.

II. AT MALAY JACK'S

When Kerry left Bond Street the mistiness of the night was developing into definite fog. It varied in different districts. Thus, St. Paul's Churchyard had been clear of it at a time when it had lain impenetrably in Trafalgar Square. When, an hour and a half after setting out in the commandeered Rolls−Royce, Kerry groped blindly along Limehouse Causeway, it was through a yellow murk that he made his way a vapour which could not only be seen, smelled and felt, but tasted.

He was in one of his most violent humours. He found some slight solace in the reflection that the impudent chauffeur, from whom he had parted in West India Dock Road, must experience great difficulty in finding his way back to the West End.

"Damn the fog!" he muttered, coughing irritably.

It had tricked him, this floating murk of London; for, while he had been enabled to keep the coupe in view right to the fringe of dockland, here, as if bred by old London's river, the fog had lain impenetrably.

Chief Inspector Kerry was a man who took many risks, but because of this cursed fog he had no definite evidence that Chada's car had gone to a certain house. Right of search he had not, and so temporarily he was baffled.

Now the nearest telephone was his objective, and presently, where a blue light dimly pierced the mist, he paused, pushed open a swing door, and stepped into a long, narrow passage. He descended three stairs, and entered a room laden with a sickly perfume compounded of stale beer and spirits; of greasy humanity European, Asiastic, and African; of cheap tobacco and cheaper scents; and, vaguely, of opium.

It was fairly well lighted, but the fog had penetrated here, veiling some of the harshness of its rough appointments. An unsavoury den was Malay Jack's, where flotsam of the river might be found. Yellow men there were, and black men and brown men. But all the women present were white.

Fan−tan was in progress at one of the tables, the four players being apparently the only strictly sober people in the room; A woman was laughing raucously as Kerry entered, and many coarse− voiced conversations were in progress; but as he pulled the rough curtain walls aside and walked into the room, a hush, highly complimentary to the Chief Inspector's reputation, fell upon the assembly. Only the woman's raucous laughter continued, rising, a hideous solo, above a sort of murmur, composed of the words "Red Kerry!" spoken in many tones.

Kerry ignored the sensation which his entrance had created, and crossed the room to a small counter, behind which a dusky man was standing, coatless and shirt sleeves rolled up. He had the skin of a Malay but the features of a stage Irishman of the old school. And, indeed, had he known his own pedigree, which is a knowledge beyond the ken of any man, partly Irish he might have found himself indeed to be.

This was Malay Jack, the proprietor of one of the roughest houses in Limehouse. His expression, while propitiatory, was not friendly, but:

"Don't get hot and bothered," snapped Kerry viciously. "I want to use your telephone, that's all."

"Oh," said the other, unable to conceal his relief, "that's easy. Come in."

He raised a flap in the counter, and Kerry, passing through, entered a little room behind the bar. Here a telephone stood upon a dirty, littered table, and, taking it up:

"City four hundred," called the Chief Inspector curtly. A moment later: "Hallo! Yes," he said. "Chief Inspector Kerry speaking. Put me through to my department, please."

He stood for a while waiting, receiver in hand, and smiled grimly to note that the uproar in the room beyond had been resumed. Evidently Malay Jack had given the "all clear" signal. Then:

"Chief Inspector Kerry speaking," he said again. "Has Detective Sergeant Durham reported?"

"Yes," was the reply, "half an hour ago. He's standing−by at Limehouse Station. He followed you in a taxi, but lost you on the way owing to the fog."

"I don't wonder," said Kerry. "His loss is not so great as mine. Anything else?"

"Nothing else."

"Good. I'll speak to Limehouse. Good−bye."

He replaced the receiver and paused for a moment, reflecting. Extracting a piece of tasteless gum from between his teeth, he deposited it in the grate, where a sickly fire burned; then, tearing the wrapper from a fresh slip, he resumed his chewing and stood looking about him with unseeing eyes. Fierce they were as ever, but introspective in expression.

Famous for his swift decisions, for once in a way he found himself in doubt. Malay Jack had keen ears, and there were those in the place who had every reason to be interested in the movements of a member of the Criminal Investigation Department, especially of one who had earned the right to be dreaded by the rats of Limehouse. London's peculiar climate fought against him, but he determined to make no more telephone calls but to proceed to Limehouse police station.

He stepped swiftly into the bar, and, as he had anticipated, nearly upset the proprietor, who was standing listening by the half−open door. Kerry smiled fiercely into the ugly face, lifted the flap, and walked down the room, through the aisle between the scattered tables, where the air was heavy with strange perfumes, touched now with the bite of London fog, and where slanting eyes and straight eyes, sober eyes and drunken eyes, regarded him furtively. Something of a second hush there was, but one not so complete as the first.

Kerry pulled the curtain aside, mounted the stair, walked along the passage and out through the swing door into the yellow gloom of the Causeway. Ten slow steps he had taken when he detected a sound of pursuit. Like a flash he turned, clenching his fists. Then:

"Inspector!" whispered a husky voice.

"Yes! Who are you? What do you want?"

A dim form loomed up through the fog.

"My name is Peters, sir. Inspector Preston knows me."

Kerry had paused immediately under a street lamp, and now he looked into the pinched, lean face of the speaker, and:

"I've heard of you," he snapped. "Got some information for me?"

"I think so; but walk on."

Chief Inspector Kerry hesitated. Peters belonged to a class which Kerry despised with all the force of his straightforward character. A professional informer has his uses from the police point of view; and while evidence of this kind often figured in reports made to the Chief Inspector, he personally avoided contact with such persons, as he instinctively and daintily avoided contact with personal dirt. But now, something so big was at stake that his hesitation was only momentary.

A vision of the pale face of Lady Rourke, of the golden head leaning weakly back upon the cushions of the coupe, as he had glimpsed it in Bond Street, rose before his mind's eye as if conjured up out of the fog. Peters shuffled along beside him, and:

"Young Chada's done himself in to−night," continued the husky voice. "He brought a swell girl to the old mans house an hour ago. I was hanging about there, thinking I might get some information. I think she was doped."

"Why?" snapped Kerry.

"Well, I was standing over on the other side of the street. Lou Chada opened the door with a key; and when the light shone out I saw him carry her in."

"Carry her in?"

"Yes. She was in evening dress, with a swell cloak."

"The car?"

"He came out again and drove it around to the garage at the back."

"Why didn't you report this at once?"

"I was on my way to do it when I saw you coming out of Malay Jack's."

The man's voice shook nervously, and:

"What are you scared about?" asked Kerry savagely. "Got anything else to tell me?"

"No, no," muttered Peters. "Only I've got an idea he saw me."

"Who saw you?"

"Lou Chada."

"What then?"

"Well, only don't leave me till we get to the station."

Kerry blew down his nose contemptuously, then stopped suddenly.

"Stand still," he ordered. "I want to listen."

Silent, they stood in a place of darkness, untouched by any lamplight. Not a sound reached them through the curtain of fog. Asiatic mystery wrapped them about, but Kerry experienced only contempt for the cowardice of his companion, and:

"You need come no farther," he said coldly. "Good night."

"But " began the man.

"Good night," repeated Kerry.

He walked on briskly, tapping the pavement with his malacca. The sneaking figure of the informer was swallowed up in the fog. But not a dozen paces had the Chief Inspector gone when he was arrested by a frenzied scream, rising, hollowly, in a dreadful, muffled crescendo. Words reached him.

"My God, he's stabbed me!"

Then came a sort of babbling, which died into a moan.

"Hell!" muttered Kerry, "the poor devil was right!"

He turned and began to run back, fumbling in his pocket for his electric torch. Almost in the same moment that he found it he stumbled upon Peters, who lay half in the road and half upon the sidewalk.

Kerry pressed the button, and met the glance of upturned, glazing eyes. Even as he dropped upon his knee beside the dying man, Peters swept his arm around in a convulsive movement, having the fingers crooked, coughed horribly, and rolled upon his face.

Switching off the light of the torch, Kerry clenched his jaws in a tense effort of listening, literally holding his breath. But no sound reached him through the muffling fog. A moment he hesitated, well knowing his danger, then viciously snapping on the light again, he quested in the blood−stained mud all about the body of the murdered man.

"Ah!"

It was an exclamation of triumph.

One corner hideously stained, for it had lain half under Peters's shoulder, Kerry gingerly lifted between finger and thumb a handkerchief of fine white silk, such as is carried in the breast pocket of an evening coat.

It bore an ornate monogram worked in gold, and representing the letters "L. C." Oddly enough, it was the corner that bore the monogram which was also bloodstained.

III. THE ROOM OF THE GOLDEN BUDDHA

It was a moot point whether Lady Pat Rourke merited condemnation or pity. She possessed that type of blonde beauty which seems to be a lodestone for mankind in general. Her husband was wealthy, twelve years her senior, and, far from watching over her with jealous care an attitude which often characterizes such unions he, on the contrary, permitted her a dangerous freedom, believing that she would appreciate without abusing it.

Her friendship with Lou Chada had first opened his eyes to the perils which beset the road of least resistance. Sir Noel Rourke was an Anglo−Indian, and his prejudice against the Eurasian was one not lightly to be surmounted. Not all the polish which English culture had given to this child of a mixed union could blind Sir Noel to the yellow streak. Courted though Chada was by some of the best people, Sir Noel remained cold.

The long, magnetic eyes, the handsome, clear−cut features, above all, that slow and alluring smile, appealed to the husband of the wilful Pat rather as evidences of Oriental, half−effeminate devilry than as passports to decent society. Oxford had veneered him, but scratch the veneer and one found the sandal−wood of the East, perfumed, seductive, appealing, but something to be shunned as brittle and untrustworthy.

Yet he hesitated, seeking to be true to his convictions. Knowing what he knew already, and what he suspected, it

is certain that, could he have viewed Lou Chada through the eyes of Chief Inspector Kerry, the affair must have terminated otherwise. But Sir Noel did not know what Kerry knew. And the pleasure−seeking Lady Rourke, with her hair of spun gold and her provoking smile, found Lou Chada dangerously fascinating; almost she was infatuated she who had known so much admiration.

Of those joys for which thousands of her plainer sisters yearn and starve to the end of their days she had experienced a surfeit. Always she sought for novelty, for new adventures. She was confident of herself, but yet and here lay the delicious thrill not wholly confident. Many times she had promised to visit the house of Lou Chada's father a mystery palace cunningly painted, a perfumed page from the Arabian poets dropped amid the interesting squalour of Limehouse.

Perhaps she had never intended to go. Who knows? But on the night when she came within the ken of Chief Inspector Kerry, Lou Chada had urged her to do so in his poetically passionate fashion, and, wanting to go, she had asked herself: "Am I strong enough? Dare I?"

They had dined, danced, and she had smoked one of the scented cigarettes which he alone seemed to be able to procure, and which, on their arrival from the East, were contained in queer little polished wooden boxes.

Then had come an unfamiliar nausea and dizziness, an uncomfortable recognition of the fact that she was making a fool of herself, and finally a semi−darkness through which familiar faces loomed up and were quickly lost again. There was the soft, musical voice of Lou Chada reassuring her, a sense of chill, of helplessness, and then for a while an interval which afterward she found herself unable to bridge.

Knowledge of verity came at last, and Lady Pat raised herself from the divan upon which she had been lying, and, her slender hands clutching the cushions, stared about her with eyes which ever grew wider.

She was in a long, rather lofty room, which was lighted by three silver lanterns swung from the ceiling. The place, without containing much furniture, was a riot of garish, barbaric colour. There were deep divans cushioned in amber and blood−red. Upon the floor lay Persian carpets and skins of beasts. Cunning niches there were, half concealing and half revealing long−necked Chinese jars; and odd little carven tables bore strangely fashioned vessels of silver. There was a cabinet of ebony inlaid with jade, there were black tapestries figured with dragons of green and gold. Curtains she saw of peacock−blue; and in a tall, narrow recess, dominating the room, squatted a great golden Buddha.

The atmosphere was laden with a strange perfume.

But, above all, this room was silent, most oppressively silent.

Lady Pat started to her feet. The whole perfumed place seemed to be swimming around her. Reclosing her eyes, she fought down her weakness. The truth, the truth resp a dangerous freedom, believing that she would appreciate without abusing it.

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But, above all, this room was silent, most oppressively silent.

Lady Pat started to her feet. The whole perfumed place seemed to be swimming around her. Reclosing her eyes, she fought down her weakness. The truth, the truth respecting Lou Chada and herself, had uprisen starkly before her. By her own folly—and she could find no tiny excuse—she had placed herself in the power of a man whom, instinctively, deep within her soul, she had always known to be utterly unscrupulous.

How cleverly he had concealed the wild animal which dwelt beneath that suave, polished exterior! Yet how ill he had concealed it! For intuitively she had always recognized its presence, but had deliberately closed her eyes, finding a joy in the secret knowledge of danger. Now at last he had discarded pretense.

The cigarette which he had offered her at the club had been drugged. She was in Limehouse, at the mercy of a man in whose veins ran the blood of ancestors to whom women had been chattels. Too well she recognized that his passion must have driven him insane, as he must know at what cost he took such liberties with one who could not lightly be so treated. But these reflections afforded poor consolation. It was not of the penalties that Lou Chada must suffer for this infringement of Western codes, but of the price that she must pay for her folly, of which Pat was thinking.

There was a nauseating taste upon her palate. She remembered having noticed it faintly while she was smoking the cigarette; indeed, she had commented upon it at the time.

"The dirty yellow blackguard!" she said aloud, and clenched her hands.

She merely echoed what many a man had said before her. She wondered at herself, and in doing so but wondered at the mystery of womanhood.

Clarity was returning. The room no longer swam around her. She crossed in the direction of a garish curtain, which instinctively she divined to mask a door. Dragging it aside, she tried the handle, but the door was locked. A second door she found, and this also proved to be locked.

There was one tall window, also covered by ornate draperies, but it was shuttered, and the shutters had locks. Another small window she discovered, glazed with amber glass, but set so high in the wall as to be inaccessible.

Dread assailed her, and dropping on to one of the divans, she hid her face in her hands.

"My God!" she whispered. "My God! Give me strength—give me courage."

For a long time she remained there, listening for any sound which should disperse the silence. She thought of her husband, of the sweet security of her home, of the things which she had forfeited because of this mad quest of adventure. And presently a key grated in a lock.

Lady Pat started to her feet with a wild, swift action which must have reminded a beholder of a startled gazelle. The drapery masking the door which she had first investigated was drawn aside. A man entered and dropped the curtain behind him.

Exactly what she had expected she could not have defined, but the presence of this perfect stranger was a complete surprise. The man, who wore embroidered slippers and a sort of long blue robe, stood there regarding her with an expression which, even in her frantic condition, she found to be puzzling. He had long, untidy gray hair brushed back from his low brow; eyes strangely like the eyes of Lou Chada, except that they were more heavy−lidded; but his skin was as yellow as a guinea, and his gaunt, cleanshaven face was the face of an Oriental.

The slender hands, too, which he held clasped before him, were yellow, and possessed a curiously arresting quality. Pat imagined them clasped about her white throat, and her very soul seemed to shrink from the man who stood there looking at her with those long, magnetic, inscrutable eyes.

She wondered why she was surprised, and suddenly realized that it was because of the expression in his eyes, for it was an expression of cold anger. Then the intruder spoke.

"Who are you?" he demanded, speaking with an accent which was unfamiliar to her, but in a voice which was not unlike the voice of Lou Chada. "Who brought you here?"

This was so wholly unexpected that for a moment she found herself unable to reply, but finally:

"How dare you!" she cried, her native courage reasserting itself. "I have been drugged and brought to this place. You shall pay for it. How dare you!"

"Ah!" The long, dark eyes regarded her unmovingly. "But who are you?"

"I am Lady Rourke. Open the door. You shall bitterly regret this outrage."

"You are Lady Rourke?" the man repeated. "Before you speak of regrets, answer the question which I have asked: Who brought you here?"

"Lou Chada."

"Ah!" There was no alteration of pose, no change of expression, but slightly the intonation had varied.

"I don't know who you are, but I demand to be released from this place instantly."

The man standing before the curtained door slightly inclined his head.

"You shall be released," he replied, "but not instantly. I will see the one who brought you here. He may not be entirely to blame. Before you leave we shall understand one another."

Tone and glance were coldly angry. Then, before the frightened woman could say another word, the man in the blue robe robe withdrew, the curtain was dropped again, and she heard the grating of a key in the lock. She ran to the door, beating upon it with her clenched hands.

"Let me go!" she cried, half hysterically. "Let me go! You shall pay for this! Oh, you shall pay for this!"

No one answered, and, turning, she leaned back against the curtain, breathing heavily and fighting for composure, for strength.

IV. ZANI CHADA, THE EURASIAN

I can't help thinking, Chief Inspector," said the officer in charge at Limehouse Station, "that you take unnecessary risks."

"Can't you?" said Kerry, tilting his bowler farther forward and staring truculently at the speaker.

"No, I can't. Since you cleaned up the dope gang down here you've been a marked man. These murders in the Chinatown area, of which this one to−night makes the third, have got some kind of big influence behind them. Yet you wander about in the fog without even a gun in your pocket."

"I don't believe in guns," rapped Kerry. "My bare hands are good enough for any yellow smart in this area. And if they give out I can kick like a mule."

The other laughed, shaking his head.

"It's silly, all the same," he persisted. "The man who did the job out there in the fog to−night might have knifed you or shot you long before you could have got here."

"He might," snapped Kerry, "but he didn't."

Yet, remembering his wife, who would be waiting for him in the cosy sitting−room he knew a sudden pang. Perhaps he did take unnecessary chances. Others had said so. Hard upon the thought came the memory of his boy, and of the telephone message which the episodes of the night had prevented him from sending.

He remembered, too, something which his fearless nature had prompted him to forget: he remembered how, just as he had arisen from beside the body of the murdered man, oblique eyes had regarded him swiftly out of the fog. He had lashed out with a boxer's instinct, but his knuckles had encountered nothing but empty air. No sound had come to tell him that the thing had not been an illusion. Only, once again, as he groped his way through the shuttered streets of Chinatown and the silence of the yellow mist, something had prompted him to turn; and again he had detected the glint of oblique eyes, and faintly had discerned the form of one who followed him.

Kerry chewed viciously, then:

"I think I'll 'phone the wife," he said abruptly. "She'll be expecting me."

Almost before he had finished speaking the 'phone bell rang, and a few moments later:

"Someone to speak to you, Chief Inspector," cried the officer in charge.

"Ah!" exclaimed Kerry, his fierce eyes lighting up. "That will be from home."

"I don't think so," was the reply. "But see who it is."

"Hello!" he called.

He was answered by an unfamiliar voice, a voice which had a queer, guttural intonation. It was the sort of voice he had learned to loathe.

"Is that Chief Inspector Kerry?"

"Yes," he snapped.

"May I take it that what I have to say will be treated in confidence?"

"Certainly not."

"Think again, Chief Inspector," the voice continued. "You are a man within sight of the ambition of years, and although you may be unaware of the fact, you stand upon the edge of a disaster. I appreciate your sense of duty and respect it. But there are times when diplomacy is a more potent weapon than force."

Kerry, listening, became aware that the speaker was a man of cultured intellect. He wondered greatly, but:

"My time is valuable," he said rapidly. "Come to the point. What do you want and who are you?"

"One moment, Chief Inspector. An opportunity to make your fortune without interfering with your career has come in your way. You have obtained possession of what you believe to be a clue to a murder."

The voice ceased, and Kerry remaining silent, immediately continued:

"Knowing your personal character, I doubt if you have communicated the fact of your possessing this evidence to anyone else. I suggest, in your own interests, that before doing so you interview me."

Kerry thought rapidly, and then:

"I don't say you're right," he rapped back. "But if I come to see you, I shall leave a sealed statement in

possession of the officer in charge here."

"To this I have no objection," the guttural voice replied, "but I beg of you to bring the evidence with you."

"I'm not to be bought," warned Kerry. "Don't think it and don't suggest it, or when I get to you I'll break you in half."

His red moustache positively bristled, and he clutched the receiver so tightly that it quivered against his ear.

"You mistake me," replied the speaker. "My name is Zani Chada. You know where I live. I shall not detain you more than five minutes if you will do me the honour of calling upon me."

Kerry chewed furiously for ten momentous seconds, then:

"I'll come!" he said.

He replaced the receiver on the hook, and, walking across to the charge desk, took an official form and a pen. On the back of the form he scribbled rapidly, watched with curiosity by the officer in charge.

"Give me an envelope," he directed.

An envelope was found and handed to him. He placed the paper in the envelope, gummed down the lapel, and addressed it in large, bold writing to the Assistant Commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Department, who was his chief. Finally:

"I'm going out," he explained.

"After what I've said?"

"After what you've said. I'm going out. If I don't come back or don't telephone within the next hour, you will know what to do with this."

The Limehouse official stared perplexedly.

"But meanwhile," he protested, "what steps am I to take about the murder? Durham will be back with the body at any moment now, and you say you've got a clue to the murderer."

"I have," said Kerry, "but I'm going to get definite evidence. Do nothing until you hear from me."

"Very good," answered the other, and Kerry, tucking his malacca cane under his arm, strode out into the fog.

His knowledge of the Limehouse area was extensive and peculiar, so that twenty minutes later, having made only one mistake in the darkness, he was pressing an electric bell set beside a door which alone broke the expanse of a long and dreary brick wall, lining a street which neither by day nor night would have seemed inviting to the casual visitor.

The door was opened by a Chinaman wearing national dress, revealing a small, square lobby, warmly lighted and furnished Orientally. Kerry stepped in briskly.

"I want to see Mr. Zani Chada. Tell him I am here. Chief Inspector Kerry is my name."

The Chinaman bowed, crossed the lobby, and, drawing some curtains aside, walked up four carpeted stairs and disappeared into a short passage revealed by the raising of the tapestry. As he did so Kerry stared about him curiously.

He had never before entered the mystery house of Zani Chada, nor had he personally encountered the Eurasian, reputed to be a millionaire, but who chose, for some obscure reason, to make his abode in this old rambling building, once a country mansion, which to−day was closely invested by dockland and the narrow alleys of Chinatown. It was curiously still in the lobby, and, as he determined, curiously Eastern. He was conscious of a sense of exhilaration. That Zani Chada controlled powerful influences, he knew well. But, reviewing the precautions which he had taken, Kerry determined that the trump card was in his possession.

The Chinese servant descended the stairs again and intimated that the visitor should follow him. Kerry, carrying his hat and cane, mounted the stairs, walked along the carpeted passage, and was ushered into a queer, low room furnished as a library.

It was lined with shelves containing strange−looking books, none of which appeared to be English. Upon the top of the shelves were grotesque figures of gods, pieces of Chinese pottery and other Oriental ornaments. Arms there were in the room, and rich carpets, carven furniture, and an air of luxury peculiarly exotic. Furthermore, he detected a faint smell of opium from which fact he divined that Zani Chada was addicted to the national vice of China.

Seated before a long narrow table was the notorious Eurasian. The table contained a number of strange and unfamiliar objects, as well as a small rack of books. An opium pipe rested in a porcelain bowl.

Zani Chada, wearing a blue robe, sat in a cushioned chair, staring toward the Chief Inspector. With one

slender yellow hand he brushed his untidy gray hair. His long magnetic eyes were half closed.

"Good evening, Chief Inspector Kerry," he said. "Won't you be seated?"

"Thanks, I'm not staying. I can hear what you've got to say standing."

The long eyes grew a little more narrow—the only change of expression that Zani Chada allowed himself.

"As you wish. I have no occasion to detain you long."

In that queer, perfumed room, with the suggestion of something sinister underlying its exotic luxury, arose a kind of astral clash as the powerful personality of the Eurasian came in contact with that of Kerry. In a sense it was a contest of rapier and battle−axe; an insidious but powerful will enlisted against the bulldog force of the Chief Inspector.

Still through half−closed eyes Zani Chada watched his visitor, who stood, feet apart and chin thrust forward aggressively, staring with wide open, fierce blue eyes at the other.

"I'm going to say one thing," declared Kerry, snapping out the words in a manner little short of ferocious. He laid his hat and cane upon a chair and took a step in the direction of the narrow, laden table. "Make me any kind of offer to buy back the evidence you think I've got, and I'll bash your face as flat as a frying− pan."

The yellow hands of Zani Chada clutched the metal knobs which ornamented the arms of the chair in which he was seated. The long eyes now presented the appearance of being entirely closed; otherwise he remained immovable.

Following a short, portentous silence:

"How grossly you misunderstood me, Chief Inspector," Chada replied, speaking very softly. "You are shortly to be promoted to a post which no one is better fitted to occupy. You enjoy great domestic happiness, and you possess a son in whom you repose great hopes. In this respect Chief Inspector, I resemble you."

Kerry's nostrils were widely dilated, but he did not speak.

"You see," continued the Eurasian, "I know many things about you. Indeed, I have watched your career with interest. Now, to be brief, a great scandal may be averted and a woman's reputation preserved if you and I, as men of the world, can succeed in understanding one another."

"I don't want to understand you," said Kerry bluntly. "But you've said enough already to justify me in blowing this whistle." He drew a police whistle from his overcoat pocket. "This house is being watched."

"I am aware of the fact," murmured Zani Chada.

"There are two people in it I want for two different reasons. If you say much more there may be three."

Chada raised his hand slowly.

"Put back your whistle, Chief Inspector."

There was a curious restraint in the Eurasian's manner which Kerry distrusted, but for which at the time he was at a loss to account. Then suddenly he determined that the man was waiting for something, listening for some sound. As if to confirm this reasoning, just at that moment a sound indeed broke the silence of the room.

Somewhere far away in the distance of the big house a gong was beaten three times softly. Kerry's fierce glance searched the face of Zani Chada, but it remained mask−like, immovable. Yet that this had been a signal of some kind the Chief Inspector did not doubt, and:

"You can't trick me," he said fiercely. "No one can leave this house without my knowledge, and because of what happened out there in the fog my hands are untied."

He took up his hat and cane from the chair.

"I'm going to search the premises," he declared.

Zani Chada stood up slowly.

"Chief Inspector," he said, "I advise you to do nothing until you have consulted your wife."

"Consulted my wife?" snapped Kerry. "What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that any steps you may take now can only lead to disaster for many, and in your own case to great sorrow."

Kerry took a step forward, two steps, then paused. He was considering certain words which the Eurasian had spoken. Without fearing the man in the physical sense, he was not fool enough to underestimate his potentialities for evil and his power to strike darkly.

"Act as you please," added Zani Chada, speaking even more softly. "But I have not advised lightly. I will receive you, Chief Inspector, at any hour of the night you care to return. By to− morrow, if you wish, you may be

independent of everybody."

Kerry clenched his fists.

"And great sorrow may be spared to others," concluded the Eurasian.

Kerry's teeth snapped together audibly; then, putting on his hat, he turned and walked straight to the door.

V. DAN KERRY, JUNIOR

Dan Kerry, junior, was humorously like his father, except that he was larger−boned and promised to grow into a much bigger man. His hair was uncompromisingly red, and grew in such irregular fashion that the comb was not made which could subdue it. He had the wide−open, fighting blue eyes of the Chief Inspector, and when he smiled the presence of two broken teeth lent him a very pugilistic appearance.

On his advent at the school of which he was now one of the most popular members, he had promptly been christened "Carrots." To this nickname young Kerry had always taken exception, and he proceeded to display his prejudice on the first day of his arrival with such force and determination that the sobriquet had been withdrawn by tacit consent of every member of the form who hitherto had favoured it.

"I'll take you all on," the new arrival had declared amidst a silence of stupefaction, "starting with you"—pointing to the biggest boy. "If we don't finish to−day, I'll begin again to− morrow."

The sheer impudence of the thing had astounded everybody. Young Kerry's treatment of his leading persecutor had produced a salutary change of opinion. Of such kidney was Daniel Kerry, junior; and when, some hours after his father's departure on the night of the murder in the fog, the 'phone bell rang, it was Dan junior, and not his mother, who answered the call.

"Hallo!" said a voice. "Is that Chief Inspector Kerry's house?"

"Yes," replied Dan.

"It has begun to rain in town," the voice continued, "Is that the Chief Inspector's son speaking?"

"Yes, I'm Daniel Kerry."

"Well, my boy, you know the way to New Scotland Yard?"

"Rather."

"He says will you bring his overall? Do you know where to find it?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Dan excitedly, delighted to be thus made a party to his father's activities.

"Well, get it. Jump on a tram at the Town Hall and bring the overall along here. Your mother will not object, will she?"

"Of course not," cried Dan. "I'll tell her. Am I to start now?"

"Yes, right away."

Mrs. Kerry was sewing by the fire in the dining room when her son came in with the news, his blue eyes sparkling excitedly. She nodded her head slowly.

"Ye'll want ye'r Burberry and ye'r thick boots," she declared, "a muffler, too, and ye'r oldest cap. I think it's madness for ye to go out on such a night, but——"

"Father said I could," protested the boy.

"He says so, and ye shall go, but I think it madness a' the same."

However, some ten minutes later young Kerry set out, keenly resenting the woollen muffler which he had been compelled to wear, and secretly determined to remove it before mounting the tram. Across one arm he carried the glistening overall which was the Chief Inspector's constant companion on wet nights abroad. The fog had turned denser, and ten paces from the door of the house took him out of sight of the light streaming from the hallway.

Mary Kerry well knew her husband's theories about coddling boys, but even so could not entirely reconcile herself to the present expedition. However, closing the door, she returned philosophically to her sewing, reflecting that little harm could come to Dan after all, for he was strong, healthy, and intelligent.

On went the boy through the mist, whistling merrily. Not twenty yards from the house a coupe was drawn up, and by the light of one of its lamps a man was consulting a piece of paper on which, presumably, an address was written; for, as the boy approached, the man turned, his collar pulled up about his face, his hat pulled down.

"Hallo!" he called. "Can you please tell me something?"

He spoke with a curious accent, unfamiliar to the boy. "A foreigner of some kind," young Kerry determined.

"What is it?" he asked, pausing.

"Will you please read and tell me if I am near this place?" the man continued, holding up the paper which he had been scrutinizing.

Dan stepped forward and bent over it. He could not make out the writing, and bent yet more, holding it nearer to the lamp. At which moment some second person neatly pinioned him from behind, a scarf was whipped about his head, and, kicking furiously but otherwise helpless, he felt himself lifted and placed inside the car.

The muffler had been thrown in such fashion about his face as to leave one eye partly free, and as he was lifted he had a momentary glimpse of his captors. With a thrill of real, sickly terror he realized that he was in the hands of Chinamen!

Perhaps telepathically this spasm of fear was conveyed to his father, for it was at about this time that the latter was interviewing Zani Chada, and at about this time that Kerry recognized, underlying the other's words, at once an ill− concealed suspense and a threat. Then, a few minutes later, had come the three strokes of the gong; and again that unreasonable dread had assailed him, perhaps because it signalized the capture of his son, news of which had been immediately telephoned to Limehouse by Zani Chada's orders.

Certain it is that Kerry left the Eurasian's house in a frame of mind which was not familiar to him. He was undecided respecting his next move. A deadly menace underlay Chada's words.

"Consult your wife," he kept muttering to himself. When the door was opened for him by the Chinese servant, he paused a moment before going out into the fog. There were men on duty at the back and at the front of the house. Should he risk all and raid the place? That Lady Rourke was captive here he no longer doubted. But it was equally certain that no further harm would come to her at the hands of her captors, since she had been traced there and since Zani Chada was well aware of the fact. Of the whereabouts of Lou Chada he could not be certain. If he was in the house, they had him.

The door was closed by the Chinaman, and Kerry stood out in the darkness of the dismal, brick−walled street, feeling something as nearly akin to dejection as was possible in one of his mercurial spirit. Something trickled upon the brim of his hat, and, raising his head, Kerry detected rain upon his upturned face. He breathed a prayer of thankfulness. This would put an end to the fog.

He began to walk along by the high brick wall, but had not proceeded far before a muffled figure arose before him and the light of an electric torch was shone into his face.

"Oh, it's you, Chief Inspector!" came the voice of the watcher.

"It is," rapped Kerry. "Unless there are tunnels under this old rat−hole, I take it the men on duty can cover all the exits?"

"All the main exits," was the reply. "But, as you say, it's a strange house, and Zani Chada has a stranger reputation."

"Do nothing until you hear from me."

"Very good, Chief Inspector."

The rain now was definitely conquering the fog, and in half the time which had been occupied by the outward journey Kerry was back again in Limehouse. police station. Unconsciously he had been hastening his pace with every stride, urged onward by an unaccountable anxiety, so that finally he almost ran into the office and up to the desk where the telephone stood.

Lifting it, he called his own number and stood tapping his foot, impatiently awaiting the reply. Presently came the voice of the operator: "Have they answered yet?"

"No."

"I will ring them again."

Kerry's anxiety became acute, almost unendurable; and when at last, after repeated attempts, no reply could be obtained from his home, he replaced the receiver and leaned for a moment on the desk, shaken with such a storm of apprehension as he had rarely known. He turned to the inspector in charge, and:

"Let me have that envelope I left with you," he directed. "And have someone 'phone for a taxi; they are to keep on till they get one. Where is Sergeant Durham?"

"At the mortuary."

"Ah!"

"Any developments, Chief Inspector?"

"Yes. But apart from keeping a close watch upon the house of Zani Chada you are to do nothing until you hear

from me again."

"Very good," said the inspector. "Are you going to wait for Durham's report?"

"No. Directly the cab arrives I am going to wait for nothing."

Indeed, he paced up and down the room like a wild beast caged, while call after call was sent to neighbouring cab ranks, for a long time without result. What did it mean, his wife's failure to answer the telephone? It might mean that neither she nor their one servant nor Dan was in the house. And if they were not in the house at this hour of the night, where could they possibly be? This it might mean, or—something worse.

A thousand and one possibilities, hideous, fantastic, appalling, flashed through his mind. He was beginning to learn what Zani Chada had meant when he had said: "I have followed your career with interest."

At last a taxi was found, and the man instructed over the 'phone to proceed immediately to Limehouse station. He seemed so long in coming that when at last the cab was heard to pause outside, Kerry could not trust himself to speak to the driver, but directed a sergeant to give him the address. He entered silently and closed the door.

A steady drizzle of rain was falling. It had already dispersed the fog, so that he might hope with luck to be home within the hour. As a matter of fact, the man performed the journey in excellent time, but it seemed to his passenger that he could have walked quicker, such was the gnawing anxiety within him and the fear which prompted him to long for wings.

Instructing the cabman to wait, Kerry unlocked the front door and entered. He had noted a light in the dining room window, and entering, he found his wife awaiting him there. She rose as he entered, with horror in her comely face.

"Dan!" she whispered. "Dan! where is ye'r mackintosh?"

"I didn't take it," he replied, endeavouring to tell himself that his apprehensions had been groundless. "But how was it that you did not answer the telephone?"

"What do ye mean, Dan?" Mary Kerry stared, her eyes growing wider and wider. "The boy answered, Dan. He set out wi' ye'r mackintosh full an hour and a half since."

"What!"

The truth leaped out at Kerry like an enemy out of ambush.

"Who sent that message?"

"Someone frae the Yard, to tell the boy to bring ye'r mackintosh alone at once. Dan! Dan———"

She advanced, hands outstretched, quivering, but Kerry had leaped out into the narrow hallway. He raised the telephone receiver, listened for a moment, and then jerked it back upon the hook.

"Dead line!" he muttered. "Someone has been at work with a wire− cutter outside the house!"

His wife came out to where he stood, and, clenching his teeth very grimly, he took her in his arms. She was shaking as if palsied.

"Mary dear," he said, "pray with all your might that I am given strength to do my duty."

She looked at him with haggard, tearless eyes.

"Tell me the truth: ha' they got my boy?"

His fingers tightened on her shoulders.

"Don't worry," he said, "and don't ask me to stay to explain. When I come back I'll have Dan with me!"

He trusted himself no further, but, clapping his hat on his head, walked out to the waiting cab.

"Back to Limehouse police station," he directed rapidly.

"Lor lumme!" muttered the taximan. "Where are you goin' to after that, guv'nor? It's a bit off the map."

"I'm going to hell!" rapped Kerry, suddenly thrusting his red face very near to that of the speaker. "And you're going to drive me!"

VI. THE KNIGHT ERRANT

Recognizing the superior strength of his captors, young Kerry soon gave up struggling. The thrill of his first real adventure entered into his blood. He remembered that he was the son of his father, and he realized, being a quick−witted lad, that he was in the grip of enemies of his father. The panic which had threatened him when first he had recognized that he was in the hands of Chinese, gave place to a cold rage—a heritage which in later years was to make him a dangerous man.

He lay quite passively in the grasp of someone who held him fast, and learned, by breathing quietly, that the presence of the muffler about his nose and mouth did not greatly inconvenience him. There was some desultory conversation between the two men in the car, but it was carried on in an odd, sibilant language which the boy did not understand, but which he divined to be Chinese. He thought how every other boy in the school would envy him, and the thought was stimulating, nerving. On the very first day of his holidays he was become the central figure of a Chinatown drama.

The last traces of fear fled. His position was uncomfortable and his limbs were cramped, but he resigned himself, with something almost like gladness, and began to look forward to that which lay ahead with a zest and a will to be no passive instrument which might have surprised his captors could they have read the mind of their captive.

The journey seemed almost interminable, but young Kerry suffered it in stoical silence until the car stopped and he was lifted and carried down stone steps into some damp, earthy−smelling place. Some distance was traversed, and then many flights of stairs were mounted, some bare but others carpeted.

Finally he was deposited in a chair, and as he raised his hand to the scarf, which toward the end of the journey had been bound more tightly about his head so as to prevent him from seeing at all, he heard a door closed and locked.

The scarf was quickly removed. And Dan found himself in a low− ceilinged attic having a sloping roof and one shuttered window. A shadeless electric lamp hung from the ceiling. Excepting the cane−seated chair in which he had been deposited and a certain amount of nondescript lumber, the attic was unfurnished. Dan rapidly considered what his father would have done in the circumstances.

"Make sure that the door is locked," he muttered.

He tried it, and it was locked beyond any shadow of doubt.

"The window."

Shutters covered it, and these were fastened with a padlock.

He considered this padlock attentively; then, drawing from his pocket one of those wonderful knives which are really miniature tool−chests, he raised from a grove the screw−driver which formed part of its equipment, and with neatness and dispatch unscrewed the staple to which the padlock was attached!

A moment later he had opened the shutters and was looking out into the drizzle of the night.

The room in which he was confined was on the third floor of a dingy, brick−built house; a portion of some other building faced him; down below was a stone−paved courtyard. To the left stood a high wall, and beyond it he obtained a glimpse of other dingy buildings. One lighted window was visible—a square window in the opposite building, from which amber light shone out.

Somewhere in the street beyond was a standard lamp. He could detect the halo which it cast into the misty rain. The glass was very dirty, and young Kerry raised the sash, admitting a draught of damp, cold air into the room. He craned out, looking about him eagerly.

A rainwater−pipe was within reach of his hand on the right of the window and, leaning out still farther, young Kerry saw that it passed beside two other, larger, windows on the floor beneath him. Neither of these showed any light.

Dizzy heights have no terror for healthy youth. The brackets supporting the rain−pipe were a sufficient staircase for the agile Dan, a more slippery prisoner than the famous Baron Trenck; and, discarding his muffler and his Burberry, he climbed out upon the sill and felt with his thick−soled boots for the first of these footholds.

Clutching the ledge, he lowered himself and felt for the next.

Then came the moment when he must trust all his weight to the pipe. Clenching his teeth, he risked it, felt for and found the third angle, and then, still clutching the pipe, stood for a moment upon the ledge of the window immediately beneath him. He was curious respecting the lighted window of the neighbouring house; and, twisting about, he bent, peering across—and saw a sight which arrested his progress.

The room within was furnished in a way which made him gasp with astonishment. It was like an Eastern picture, he thought. Her golden hair dishevelled and her hands alternately clenching and unclenching, a woman whom he considered to be most wonderfully dressed was pacing wildly up and down, a look of such horror upon her pale face that Dan's heart seemed to stop beating for a moment!

Here was real trouble of a sort which appealed to all the chivalry in the boy's nature. He considered the window, which was glazed with amber−coloured glass, observed that it was sufficiently open to enable him to slip the fastening and open it entirely could he but reach it. And—yes!—there was a rain− pipe!

Climbing down to the yard, he looked quickly about him, ran across, and climbed up to the lighted window. A moment later he had pushed it widely open.

He was greeted by a stifled cry, but, cautiously transferring his weight from the friendly pipe to the ledge, he got astride of it, one foot in the room. Then, by exercise of a monkey−like agility, he wriggled his head and shoulders within.

"It's all right," he said softly and reassuringly; "I'm Dan Kerry, son of Chief Inspector Kerry. Can I be of any assistance?"

Her hands clasped convulsively together, the woman stood looking up at him.

"Oh, thank God!" said the captive. "But what are you going to do? Can you get me out?"

"Don't worry," replied Dan confidently. "Father and I can manage it all right!"

He performed a singular contortion, as a result of which his other leg and foot appeared inside the window. Then, twisting around, he lowered himself and dropped triumphantly upon a cushioned divan. At that moment he would have faced a cage full of man−eating tigers. The spirit of adventure had him in its grip. He stood up, breathing rapidly, his crop of red hair more dishevelled than usual.

Then, before he could stir or utter any protest, the golden− haired princess whom he had come to rescue stooped, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him.

"You darling, brave boy!" she said. "I think you have saved me from madness."

Young Kerry, more flushed than ever, extricated himself, and:

"You're not out of the mess yet," he protested. "The only difference is that I'm in it with you!"

"But where is your father?"

"I'm looking for him."

"What!"

"Oh! he's about somewhere," Dan assured her confidently.

"But, but——" She was gazing at him wide−eyed, "Didn't he send you here?"

"You bet he didn't," returned young Kerry. "I came here on my own accord, and when I go you're coming with me. I can't make out how you got here, anyway. Do you know whose house this is?"

"Oh, I do, I do!"

"Whose?"

"It belongs to a man called Chada."

"Chada? Never heard of him. But I mean, what part of London is it in?"

"Whatever do you mean? It is in Limehouse, I believe. I don't understand. You came here."

"I didn't," said young Kerry cheerfully; "I was fetched!"

"By your father?"

"Not on your life. By a couple of Chinks! I'll tell you something." He raised his twinkling blue eyes. "We are properly up against it. I suppose you couldn't climb down a rain−pipe?"

VII. RETRIBUTION

It was that dark, still, depressing hour of the night, when all life is at its lowest ebb. In the low, strangely perfumed room of books Zani Chada sat before his table, his yellow hands clutching the knobs on his chair arms, his long, inscrutable eyes staring unseeingly before him.

Came a disturbance and the sound of voices, and Lou Chada, his son, stood at the doorway. He still wore his evening clothes, but he no longer looked smart. His glossy black hair was dishevelled, and his handsome, olive face bore a hunted look. Panic was betoken by twitching mouth and fear−bright eyes. He stopped, glaring at his father, and:

"Why are you not gone?" asked the latter sternly. "Do you wish to wreck me as well as yourself ?"

"The police have posted a man opposite Kwee's house. I cannot get out that way."

"There was no one there when the boy was brought in."

"No, but there is now. Father!" He took a step forward. "I'm trapped. They sha'n't take me. You won't let them take me?"

Zani Chada stirred not a muscle, but:

"To−night," he said, "your mad passion has brought ruin to both of us. For the sake of a golden doll who is not worth the price of the jewels she wears, you have placed yourself within reach of the hangman."

"I was mad, I was mad," groaned the other.

"But I, who was sane, am involved in the consequences," retorted his father.

"He will be silent at the price of the boy's life."

"He may be," returned Zani Chada. "I hate him, but he is a man. Had you escaped, he might have consented to be silent. Once you are arrested, nothing would silence him."

"If the case is tried it will ruin Pat's reputation."

"What a pity!" said Zani Chada.

In some distant part of the house a gong was struck three times.

"Go," commanded his father. "Remain at Kwee's house until I send for you. Let Ah Fang go to the room above and see that the woman is silent. An outcry would ruin our last chance."

Lou Chada raised his hands, brushing the hair back from his wet forehead, then, staring haggardly at his father, turned and ran from the room.

A minute later Kerry was ushered in by the Chinese servant. The savage face was set like a mask. Without removing his hat, he strode across to the table and bent down so that fierce, wide− open blue eyes stared closely into long, half−closed black ones.

"I've got one thing to say," explained Kerry huskily. "Whatever the hangman may do to your slimy son, and whatever happens to the little blonde fool he kidnapped, if you've laid a hand on my kid I'll kick you to death, if I follow you round the world to do it."

Zani Chada made no reply, but his knuckles gleamed, so tightly did he clutch the knobs on the chair arms. Kerry's savagery would have awed any man, even though he had supposed it to be the idle threat of a passionate man. But Zani Chada knew all men, and he knew this one. When Daniel Kerry declared that in given circumstances he would kick Zani Chada to death, he did not mean that he would shoot him, strangle him, or even beat him with his fists; he meant precisely what he said—that he would kick him to death—and Zani Chada knew it.

Thus there were some moments of tense silence during which the savage face of the Chief Inspector drew even closer to the gaunt, yellow face of the Eurasian. Finally:

"Listen only for one moment," said Zani Chada. His voice had lost its guttural intonation. He spoke softly, sibilantly. "I, too, am a father———"

"Don't mince words!" shouted Kerry. "You've kidnapped my boy. If I have to tear your house down brick by brick I'll find him. And if you've hurt one hair of his head—you know what to expect!"

He quivered. The effort of suppression which he had imposed upon himself was frightful to witness. Zani

Chada, student of men, knew that in despite of his own physical strength and of the hidden resources at his beck, he stood nearer to primitive retribution than he had ever done. Yet:

"I understand," he continued. "But you do not understand. Your boy is not in this house. Oh! violence cannot avail! It can only make his loss irreparable."

Kerry, nostrils distended, eyes glaring madly, bent over him.

"Your scallywag of a son," he said hoarsely, "has gone one step too far. His adventures have twice before ended in murder—and you have covered him. This time you can't do it. I'm not to be bought. We've stood for the Far East in London long enough. Your cub hangs this time. Get me? There'll be no bargaining. The woman's reputation won't stop me. My kid's danger won't stop me. But if you try to use him as a lever I'll boot you to your stinking yellow paradise and they'll check you in as pulp."

"You speak of three deaths," murmured Zani Chada.

Kerry clenched his teeth so tightly that his maxillary muscles protruded to an abnormal degree. He thrust his clenched fists into his coat pockets.

"We all follow our vocations in life," resumed the Eurasian, "to the best of our abilities. But is professional kudos not too dearly bought at the price of a loved one lost for ever? A far better bargain would be, shall we say, ten thousand pounds, as the price of a silk handkerchief———"

Kerry's fierce blue eyes closed for a fraction of a second. Yet, in that fraction of a second, he had visualized some of the things which ten thousand pounds—a sum he could never hope to possess—would buy. He had seen his home, as he would have it— and he had seen Dan there, safe and happy at his mother's side. Was he entitled to disregard the happiness of his wife, the life of his boy, the honourable name of Sir Noel Rourke, because an outcast like Peters had come to a fitting end—because a treacherous Malay and a renegade Chinaman had, earlier, gone the same way, sped, as he suspected, by the same hand?

"My resources are unusual," added Chada, speaking almost in a whisper. "I have cash to this amount in my safe———"

So far he had proceeded when he was interrupted; and the cause of the interruption was this:

A few moments earlier another dramatic encounter had taken place in a distant part of the house. Kerry Junior, having scientifically tested all the possible modes of egress from the room in which Lady Pat was confined, had long ago desisted, and had exhausted his ingenuity in plans which discussion had proved to be useless. In spite of the novelty and the danger of his situation, nature was urging her laws. He was growing sleepy. The crowning tragedy had been the discovery that he could not regain the small, square window set high in the wall from which he had dropped into this luxurious prison. Now, as the two sat side by side upon a cushioned divan, the woman's arm about the boy's shoulders, they were startled to hear, in the depths of the house, three notes of a gong.

Young Kerry's sleepiness departed. He leapt to his feet as though electrified.

"What was that?"

There was something horrifying in those gong notes in the stillness of the night. Lady Pat's beautiful eyes grew glassy with fear.

"I don't know," replied Dan. "It seemed to come from below."

He ran to the door, drew the curtain aside, and pressed his ear against one of the panels, listening intently. As he did so, his attitude grew tense, his expression changed, then:

"We're saved!" he cried, turning a radiant face to the woman. "I heard my father's voice!"

"Oh, are you sure, are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure!"

He bent to press his ear to the panel again, when a stifled cry from his companion brought him swiftly to his feet. The second door in the room had opened silently, and a small Chinaman, who carried himself with a stoop, had entered, and now, a menacing expression upon his face, was quickly approaching the boy.

What he had meant to do for ever remained in doubt, for young Kerry, knowing his father to be in the house and seeing an open door before him, took matters into his own hands. At the moment that the silent Chinaman was about to throw his arms about him, the pride of the junior school registered a most surprising left accurately on the point of Ah Fang's jaw, following it up by a wilful transgression of Queensberry rules in the form of a stomach punch which temporarily decided the issue. Then:

"Quick! quick!" he cried breathlessly, grasping Lady Pat's hand. "This is where we run!"

In such fashion was Zani Chada interrupted, the interruption taking the form of a sudden, shrill outcry:

"Dad! dad! Where are you, dad?"

Kerry spun about as a man galvanized. His face became transfigured.

"This way, Dan!" he cried. "This way, boy!"

Came a clatter of hurrying feet, and into the low, perfumed room burst Dan Kerry, junior, tightly clasping the hand of a pale− faced, dishevelled woman in evening dress. It was Lady Rourke; and although she seemed to be in a nearly fainting condition, Dan dragged her, half running, into the room.

Kerry gave one glance at the pair, then, instantly, he turned to face Zani Chada. The latter, like a man of stone, sat in his carved chair, eyes nearly closed. The Chief Inspector whipped out a whistle and raised it to his lips. He blew three blasts upon it.

From one—two—three—four points around the house the signal was answered.

Zani Chada fully opened his long, basilisk eyes.

"You win, Chief Inspector," he said. "But much may be done by clever counsel. If all fails———"

"Well?" rapped Kerry fiercely, at the same time throwing his arm around the boy.

"I may continue to take an interest in your affairs."

A tremendous uproar arose, within and without the house. The police were raiding the place. Lady Rourke sank down, slowly, almost at the Eurasian's feet.

But Chief Inspector Kerry experienced an unfamiliar chill as his uncompromising stare met the cold hatred which blazed out of the black eyes, narrowed, now, and serpentine, of Zani Chada.