

## CHAPTER 19

I HAVE never seen a man quite so surprised as Inspector Weymouth.

"This is absolutely incredible!" he said. "There's only one door to your chambers. We found it bolted from the inside."

"Yes," groaned West, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I bolted it myself at eleven o'clock, when I came in."

"No human being could climb up or down to your windows. The plans of the aeroplane were inside a safe."

"I put them there myself," said West, "on returning from the War Office, and I had occasion to consult them after I had come in and bolted the door. I returned them to the safe and locked it. That it was still locked you saw for yourselves, and no one else in the world knows the combination."

"But the plans have gone," said Weymouth. "It's magic! How was it done? What happened last night, sir? What did you mean when you rang us up?"

Smith during this colloquy was pacing rapidly up and down the room. He turned abruptly to the aviator.

"Every fact you can remember, Mr. West, please," he said tersely; "and be as brief as you possibly can."

"I came in, as I said," explained West "about eleven o'clock and having made some notes relating to an interview arranged for this morning, I locked the plans in the safe and turned in."

"There was no one hidden anywhere in your chambers?" snapped Smith.

"There was not," replied West. "I looked. I invariably do. Almost immediately, I went to sleep."

"How many chloral tablets did you take?" I interrupted.

Norris West turned to me with a slow smile.

"You're cute, Doctor," he said. "I took two. It's a bad habit, but I can't sleep without. They are specially made up for me by a firm in Philadelphia."

"How long sleep lasted, when it became filled with uncanny dreams, and when those dreams merged into reality, I do not know-- shall never know, I suppose. But out of the dreamless void a face came to me--closer--closer--and peered into mine.

"I was in that curious condition wherein one knows that one is dreaming and seeks to awaken--to escape. But a nightmare-like oppression held me. So I must lie and gaze into the seared yellow face that hung over me, for it would drop so close that I could trace the cicatrized scar running from the left ear to the corner of the mouth, and drawing up the lip like the lip of a snarling cur. I could look into the malignant, jaundiced eyes; I could hear the dim whispering of the distorted mouth-- whispering that seemed to counsel something--something evil. That whispering intimacy was indescribably repulsive. Then the wicked yellow face would be withdrawn, and would recede until it became as a pin's head in the darkness far above me--almost like a glutinous, liquid thing.

"Somehow I got upon my feet, or dreamed I did--God knows where dreaming ended and reality began. Gentlemen maybe you'll conclude I went mad last night, but as I stood holding on to the bedrail I heard the blood throbbing through my arteries with a noise like a screw-propeller.

I started laughing. The laughter issued from my lips with a shrill whistling sound that pierced me with physical pain and seemed to wake the echoes of the whole block. I thought myself I was going mad, and I tried to command my will--to break the power of the chloral--for I concluded that I had accidentally taken an overdose.

"Then the walls of my bedroom started to recede, till at last I stood holding on to a bed which had shrunk to the size of a doll's cot, in the middle of a room like Trafalgar Square! That window yonder was such a long way off I could scarcely see it, but I could just detect a Chinaman--the owner of the evil yellow face--creeping through it. He was followed by another, who was enormously tall--so tall that, as they came towards me (and it seemed to take them something like half-an-hour to cross this incredible apartment in my dream), the second Chinaman seemed to tower over me like a cypress-tree.

"I looked up to his face--his wicked, hairless face. Mr. Smith, whatever age I live to, I'll never forget that face I saw last night--or did I see it? God knows! The pointed chin, the great dome of a forehead, and the eyes--heavens above, the huge green eyes!"

He shook like a sick man, and I glanced at Smith significantly. Inspector Weymouth was stroking his mustache, and his mingled expression of incredulity and curiosity was singular to behold.

"The pumping of my blood," continued West, "seemed to be bursting my body; the room kept expanding and contracting. One time the ceiling would be pressing down on my head, and the Chinamen--sometimes I thought there were two of them, sometimes twenty--became dwarfs; the next instant it shot up like the roof of a cathedral.

"Can I be awake,' I whispered, 'or am I dreaming?"

"My whisper went sweeping in windy echoes about the walls, and was lost in the shadowy distances up under the invisible roof.

"You are dreaming--yes.' It was the Chinaman with the green eyes who was addressing me, and the words that he uttered appeared to occupy an immeasurable time in the utterance. 'But at will I can render the subjective objective.' I don't think I can have dreamed those singular words, gentlemen. "And then he fixed the green eyes upon me--the blazing green eyes. I made no attempt to move. They seemed to be draining me of something vital--bleeding me of every drop of mental power. The whole nightmare room grew green, and I felt that I was being absorbed into its greenness.

"I can see what you think. And even in my delirium-- if it was delirium--I thought the same. Now comes the climax of my experience--my vision--I don't know what to call it. I SAW some WORDS issuing from my own mouth!"

Inspector Weymouth coughed discreetly. Smith whisked round upon him.

"This will be outside your experience, Inspector, I know," he said, "but Mr. Norris West's statement does not surprise me in the least. I know to what the experience was due."

Weymouth stared incredulously, but a dawning perception of the truth was come to me, too.

"How I SAW a SOUND I just won't attempt to explain; I simply tell you I saw it. Somehow I knew I had betrayed myself--given something away."

"You gave away the secret of the lock combination!" rapped Smith.

"Eh!" grunted Weymouth.

But West went on hoarsely:

"Just before the blank came a name flashed before my eyes. It was `Bayard Taylor.'"

At that I interrupted West.

"I understand!" I cried. "I understand! Another name has just occurred to me, Mr. West--that of the Frenchman, Moreau."

"You have solved the mystery," said Smith. "It was natural Mr. West should have thought of the American traveler, Bayard Taylor, though. Moreau's book is purely scientific. He has probably never read it."

"I fought with the stupor that was overcoming me," continued West, "striving to associate that vaguely familiar name with the fantastic things through which I moved. It seemed to me that the room was empty again. I made for the hall, for the telephone. I could scarcely drag my feet along. It seemed to take me half-an-hour to get there. I remember calling up Scotland Yard, and I remember no more."

There was a short, tense interval.

In some respects I was nonplused; but, frankly, I think Inspector Weymouth considered West insane. Smith, his hands locked behind his back, stared out of the window.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND" he said suddenly. "Weymouth, when is the first train to Tilbury?"

"Five twenty-two from Fenchurch Street," replied the Scotland Yard man promptly.

"Too late!" rapped my friend. "Jump in a taxi and pick up two good men to leave for China at once! Then go and charter a special to Tilbury to leave in twenty-five minutes. Order another cab to wait outside for me."

Weymouth was palpably amazed, but Smith's tone was imperative. The Inspector departed hastily.

I stared at Smith, not comprehending what prompted this singular course.

"Now that you can think clearly, Mr. West," he said, "of what does your experience remind you? The errors of perception regarding time; the idea of SEEING A SOUND; the illusion that the room alternately increased and diminished in size; your fit of laughter, and the recollection of the name Bayard Taylor. Since evidently you are familiar with that author's work--'The Land of the Saracen,' is it not?--these symptoms of the attack should be familiar, I think."

Norris West pressed his hands to his evidently aching head

"Bayard Taylor's book," he said dully. "Yes!...I know of what my brain sought to remind me--Taylor's account of his experience under hashish. Mr. Smith, someone doped me with hashish!"

Smith nodded grimly.

"Cannabis indica," I said--"Indian hemp. That is what you were drugged with. I have no doubt that now you experience a feeling of nausea and intense thirst, with aching in the muscles, particularly the deltoid. I think you must have taken at least fifteen grains."

Smith stopped his perambulations immediately in front of West, looking into his dulled eyes.

"Someone visited your chambers last night," he said slowly, "and for your chloral tabloids substituted some containing hashish, or perhaps not pure hashish. Fu-Manchu is a profound chemist."

Norris West started.

"Someone substituted--" he began.

"Exactly," said Smith, looking at him keenly; "someone who was here yesterday. Have you any idea whom it could have been?"

West hesitated. "I had a visitor in the afternoon," he said, seemingly speaking the words unwillingly, "but--"

"A lady?" jerked Smith. "I suggest that it was a lady."

West nodded.

"You're quite right," he admitted. "I don't know how you arrived at the conclusion, but a lady whose acquaintance I made recently--a foreign lady."

"Karamaneh!" snapped Smith.

"I don't know what you mean in the least, but she came here-- knowing this to be my present address--to ask me to protect her from a mysterious man who had followed her right from Charing Cross. She said he was down in the lobby, and naturally, I asked her to wait here whilst I went and sent him about his business."

He laughed shortly.

"I am over-old," he said, "to be guyed by a woman. You spoke just now of someone called Fu-Manchu. Is that the crook I'm indebted to for the loss of my plans? I've had attempts made by agents of two European governments, but a Chinaman is a novelty."

"This Chinaman," Smith assured him, "is the greatest novelty of his age. You recognize your symptoms now from Bayard Taylor's account?"

"Mr. West's statement," I said, "ran closely parallel with portions of Moreau's book on 'Hashish Hallucinations.' Only Fu-Manchu, I think, would have thought of employing Indian hemp. I doubt, though, if it was pure *Cannabis indica*. At any rate, it acted as an opiate--"

"And drugged Mr. West," interrupted Smith, "sufficiently to enable Fu-Manchu to enter unobserved."

"Whilst it produced symptoms which rendered him an easy subject for the Doctor's influence. It is difficult in this case to separate hallucination from reality, but I think, Mr. West, that Fu-Manchu must have exercised an hypnotic influence upon your drugged brain. We have evidence that he dragged from you the secret of the combination."

"God knows we have!" said West. "But who is this Fu-Manchu, and how-- how in the name of wonder did he get into my chambers?"

Smith pulled out his watch. "That," he said rapidly, "I cannot delay to explain if I'm to intercept the man who has the plans. Come along, Petrie; we must be at Tilbury within the hour. There is just a bare chance."

## CHAPTER 20

IT was with my mind in a condition of unique perplexity that I hurried with Nayland Smith into the cab which waited and dashed off through the streets in which the busy life of London just stirred into being. I suppose I need not say that I could penetrate no farther into this, Fu-Manchu's latest plot, than the drugging of Norris West with hashish? Of his having been so drugged with Indian hemp--that is, converted temporarily into a maniac--would have been evident to any medical man who had heard his statement and noted the distressing after-effects which conclusively pointed to Indian hemp poisoning. Knowing something of the Chinese doctor's powers, I could understand that he might have extracted from West the secret of the combination by sheer force of will whilst the American was under the influence of the drug. But I could not understand how Fu-Manchu had gained access to locked chambers on the third story of a building.

"Smith," I said, "those bird tracks on the window-sill--they furnish the key to a mystery which is puzzling me."

"They do," said Smith, glancing impatiently at his watch. "Consult your memories of Dr. Fu-Manchu's habits--especially your memories of his pets."

I reviewed in my mind the creatures gruesome and terrible which surrounded the Chinaman--the scorpions, the bacteria, the noxious things which were the weapons wherewith he visited death upon whomsoever opposed the establishment of a potential Yellow Empire. But no one of them could account for the imprints upon the dust of West's window-sill.

"You puzzle me, Smith," I confessed. "There is much in this extraordinary case that puzzles me. I can think of nothing to account for the marks."

"Have you thought of Fu-Manchu's marmoset?" asked Smith.

"The monkey!" I cried.

"They were the footprints of a small ape," my friend continued. "For a moment I was deceived as you were, and believed them to be the tracks of a large bird; but I have seen the footprints of apes before now, and a marmoset, though an American variety, I believe, is not unlike some of the apes of Burma."

"I am still in the dark," I said.

"It is pure hypothesis," continued Smith, "but here is the theory--in lieu of a better one it covers the facts. The marmoset--and it is contrary from the character of Fu-Manchu to keep any creature for mere amusement--is trained to perform certain duties.

"You observed the waterspout running up beside the window; you observed the iron bar intended to prevent a window-cleaner from falling out? For an ape the climb from the court below to the sill above was a simple one. He carried a cord, probably attached to his body. He climbed on to the sill, over the bar, and climbed down again. By means of this cord a rope was pulled up over the bar, by means of the rope one of those ladders of silk and bamboo. One of the Doctor's servants ascended--probably to ascertain if the hashish had acted successfully. That was the yellow dream-face which West saw bending over him. Then followed the Doctor, and to his giant will the drugged brain of West was a pliant instrument which he bent to his own ends. The court would be deserted at that hour of the night, and, in any event, directly after the ascent the

ladder probably was pulled up, only to be lowered again when West had revealed the secret of his own safe and Fu-Manchu had secured the plans. The reclosing of the safe and the removing of the hashish tabloids, leaving no clew beyond the delirious ravings of a drug slave-- for so anyone unacquainted with the East must have construed West's story--is particularly characteristic. His own tabloids were returned, of course. The sparing of his life alone is a refinement of art which points to a past master."

"Karamaneh was the decoy again?" I said shortly.

"Certainly. Hers was the task to ascertain West's habits and to substitute the tabloids. She it was who waited in the luxurious car-- infinitely less likely to attract attention at that hour in that place than a modest taxi--and received the stolen plans. She did her work well.

"Poor Karamaneh; she had no alternative! I said I would have given a hundred pounds for a sight of the messenger's face--the man to whom she handed them. I would give a thousand now!"

"ANDAMAN--SECOND," I said. "What did she mean?"

"Then it has not dawned upon you?" cried Smith excitedly, as the cab turned into the station. "The ANDAMAN, of the Oriental Navigation Company's line, leaves Tilbury with the next tide for China ports. Our man is a second-class passenger. I am wiring to delay her departure, and the special should get us to the docks inside of forty minutes."

Very vividly I can reconstruct in my mind that dash to the docks through the early autumn morning. My friend being invested with extraordinary powers from the highest authorities, by Inspector Weymouth's instructions the line had been cleared all the way.

Something of the tremendous importance of Nayland Smith's mission came home to me as we hurried on to the platform, escorted by the station-master, and the five of us--for Weymouth had two other C.I.D. men with him-- took our seats in the special.

Off we went on top speed, roaring through stations, where a glimpse might be had of wondering officials upon the platforms, for a special train was a novelty on the line. All ordinary traffic arrangements were held up until we had passed through, and we reached Tilbury in time which I doubt not constituted a record.

There at the docks was the great liner, delayed in her passage to the Far East by the will of my royally empowered companion. It was novel, and infinitely exciting.

"Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith?" said the captain interrogatively, when we were shown into his room, and looked from one to another and back to the telegraph form which he held in his hand.

"The same, Captain," said my friend briskly. "I shall not detain you a moment. I am instructing the authorities at all ports east of Suez to apprehend one of your second-class passengers, should he leave the ship. He is in possession of plans which practically belong to the British Government!" "Why not arrest him now?" asked the seaman bluntly.

"Because I don't know him. All second-class passengers' baggage will be searched as they land. I am hoping something from that, if all else fails. But I want you privately to instruct your stewards to watch any passenger of Oriental nationality, and to cooperate with the two Scotland Yard men who are joining you for the voyage. I look to you to recover these plans, Captain."

"I will do my best," the captain assured him.

Then, from amid the heterogeneous group on the dockside, we were watching the liner depart, and Nayland Smith's expression was a very singular one. Inspector Weymouth stood with us, a badly puzzled man. Then occurred the extraordinary incident which to this day remains inexplicable, for, clearly heard by all three of us, a guttural voice said:

"Another victory for China, Mr. Nayland Smith!"

I turned as though I had been stung. Smith turned also. My eyes passed from face to face of the group about us. None was familiar. No one apparently had moved away.

But the voice was the voice of DOCTOR FU-MANCHU.

As I write of it, now, I can appreciate the difference between that happening, as it appealed to us, and as it must appeal to you who merely read of it. It is beyond my powers to convey the sense of the uncanny which the episode created. Yet, even as I think of it, I feel again, though in lesser degree, the chill which seemed to creep through my veins that day.

From my brief history of the wonderful and evil man who once walked, by the way unsuspected, in the midst of the people of England-- near whom you, personally, may at some time unwittingly, have been-- I am aware that much must be omitted. I have no space for lengthy examinations of the many points but ill illuminated with which it is dotted. This incident at the docks is but one such point.

Another is the singular vision which appeared to me whilst I lay in the cellar of the house near Windsor. It has since struck me that it possessed peculiarities akin to those of a hashish hallucination. Can it be that we were drugged on that occasion with Indian hemp? Cannabis indica is a treacherous narcotic, as every medical man knows full well; but Fu-Manchu's knowledge of the drug was far in advance of our slow science. West's experience proved so much.

I may have neglected opportunities--later, you shall judge if I did so-- opportunities to glean for the West some of the strange knowledge of the secret East. Perhaps, at a future time, I may rectify my errors. Perhaps that wisdom--the wisdom stored up by Fu-Manchu--is lost forever. There is, however, at least a bare possibility of its survival, in part; and I do not wholly despair of one day publishing a scientific sequel to this record of our dealings with the Chinese doctor.