



## Pell Street Blues

By ACHMED ABDULLAH

*A fire-vivid story of China and Chinatown, the first of a fine group by the famous author of "The Blue-eyed Manchu," "The Swinging Caravan" and others.*



Illustrated by  
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FATE wrote the first chapter of this tale some centuries ago, when it planted the seeds of mutual hate in two kindred Mongol races: in Chinese and in Manchu, and by the same token, in patient, earthbound peasant and in hawkish nomad, hard-galloping across the land, conquering it with the swish of the red sword, the scream and bray of the long-stemmed war-trumpets, the hollow nasal drone of the kettle-drums—and overhead, the carrion-fed vultures paralleling the marauders' progress on eager wings.

Fate wrote the second chapter sixty-odd years ago, when Foh Wong and Yang Shen-Li were boys in the cold northern town of Ninguta, where they threw stones at each other and swapped salty abuse; although it was Yang Shen-Li, the Manchu, the mandarin's son, who did most of the stone-throwing, whereas Foh Wong, whose parents were Chinese coolies tilling the barren clay, did most of the cursing—from a safe distance. For he valued his skin—which, together with his shrewd brain, was his sole possession.

Fate wrote the third chapter a little over fifty years ago, when parlous times had come to China—with Russia at the western and Japan at the

eastern border, both waiting for an excuse to invade the tottering Empire and tear it to pieces—and when, one morning, Foh Wong stopped Yang Shen-Li on the street and said:

"A word with you!"

"What is it, mud-turtle?"

"Indeed," replied the other, "I am no more than a mud-turtle, while you are an aristocrat, an iron-capped prince. And yet"—slowly—"today I have the whip-hand."

"Eh?" exclaimed Yang Shen-Li.

He was startled. He wondered if Foh Wong knew, how he knew—heard him drop his voice to a purr:

"You were not alone last night. I watched from behind a tree. And should I proclaim what I saw, there would be your handsome head spiked on a tall pole in front of the Palace of August Justice."

The Manchu shrugged his shoulders. He tried to speak casually:

"I do not fear death."

"Of course not—since you are a brave fool. But being also an honorable fool, you would not wish to bring black disgrace on your father, to cause him to lose face. And—forgive the wretched pun—you

father would lose a great deal of face, if you should lose your head. A murderer's head—"

"I did not murder."

"You killed."

"In self-defense. He insulted me, struck me, drew his revolver and fired—the insolent foreigner!"

"But—be pleased to remember—a most important foreigner. A high Russian official whose corpse you—ah—buried in back of Han Ma's camel stables." He stabbed out an accusing finger. "I saw you."

"Have you witnesses?"

"Not a one. I was alone."

"Then?"

"There will be witnesses, when the time comes. Three of my cousins. A dozen, if you prefer."

"Lying witnesses!"

"Lying, only, in swearing they saw the deed. Not lying as to the deed itself. And though you are a mandarin's son, the Dowager Empress, with Russia's soldiers massed at the frontier, will give an order to her red-robed executioners, will have your handsome head removed, if I should—"

"**I**S there a price for your silence, coolie?" interrupted Yang Shen-Li.

"Is there not a price for everything?"

"How much?"

"No money. Not a single silver tael." Foh Wong paused. "The price of my silence is—a word."

"A word?"

"Yes. A mere word from you—to Na Liu. A word telling her I desire her greatly—wish her to be my wife."

"But"—the Manchu stammered with rage—"she—"

"Loves *you*? I know. And I know, too, that, loving you, she will not relish the thought of your bleeding head grinning down at her from a tall pole, and will therefore marry *me*, the mud-turtle. . . . *Hayah!*" with sudden violence. "Go to her! At once! For today I command, and you will obey!"

Yang Shen-Li stared at the other.

"Yes," he said heavily. "I shall obey." He took a step nearer. "But—listen to me, coolie!" His words clicked and broke like dropping icicles. "I hate you. Ah—by the Buddha!—I shall always hate you."

"You hate me no more than I hate you," was the answer. "But"—and Foh Wong's eyes gleamed triumphantly through meager almond lids—"you

are helpless, O paper tiger with paper teeth. I am not. So—keep on hating me!"

**N**EVER, through the decades, though for years they did not see one another, did the hate of these two weaken.

It stretched, hard and stark and blighting, athwart the full span of both their lives. It followed the churned steamship lane to San Francisco and Seattle. It traveled thence across the continent to New York—there to abut and peak to a grim, rather fantastic climax in the maze and reek and riot of half a dozen tired old streets that, a few blocks away from the greasy drab of the river, cluster toward the Bowery, toward the pride of the Wall Street mart, as far even as busy, bartering, negligent Broadway.

Streets of Chinatown, squatting turgid and sardonic and tremendously alien! Not caring a tinker's dam for the White Man's world roaring its up-to-date, efficient steel-and-concrete symphony on all sides.

Rickety, this Chinatown; moldy and viscous, not over-clean, smelling distressingly of sewer gas and rotting vegetables and sizzling, rancid fat. Yet a fact to be reckoned with in Gotham's kaleidoscopic pattern. A cultural and civil entity not without dignity. A thing aloof, apart, slightly supercilious—and intensely human. And being human, a fit background for a tragic tale. . . .

Not that this tale is entirely tragic. For tragedy, no less than comedy, is after all only a matter of viewpoint, perhaps of race and religion—two accidents whose sum-total spells prejudice.

Therefore, if your sense of humor be faintly oblique, faintly Oriental, in other words, you may derive a certain amusement from the thought of Foh Wong, no longer a coolie but a prosperous New York merchant, cooped up in the sweltering garret of his Pell Street house, with the door locked and the windows tightly shuttered, and an agony of fear forever stewing in his brain. You may also laugh at the idea of Yang Shen-Li lording it gloriously over Foh Wong's Cantonese clerks, spending Foh Wong's money with a free and reckless hand—and in the evening, after a pleasant hour or two at the Azure Dragon Club over an archaic mandarin gambling game of "Patting Green Butterflies" or "Ladies on Horseback" or "Heigh-oh! Flies the Kite," mounting to the second floor of the Pell Street house, there to bow courteously

before Na Liu, his wrinkled old wife, once the wife of Foh Wong! She would be sitting stiffly erect, in the proper Chinese manner, on a chair of ebony and lacquer encrusted with rose-quartz, her tiny feet barely touching the floor and her hands demurely folded; and Yang Shen-Li would say to her:

"Moonbeam, was there ever love as staunch as ours?"

She would give a quaint, giggling, girlish little laugh.

"Never, O Great One!" she would reply.

"Never!" he would echo. "The same love until death—may it not be for many years! The same love that came to you and me, so long ago, when the world was young back home in Ninguta—and we were young—"

"And you the iron-capped prince—and I the gardener's daughter!"

"But all the world to me—as you are today."



"For the sake of my love," she said with a queer triumph,  
"—I shall marry another!"

Always, as often as he spoke the words, he made a great gesture with his strong, hairy hand. A gesture that cleaved the trooping shadows in the room with a certain brutality, that brushed through the sudden, clogged stillness like a conjurer's wand, sweeping away the dust and grime of Pell Street, the dust and grime of the dead years, and calling up the cool, scented spring sweetness of the small Manchu-Chinese border town where both had

lived and loved. . . .

He remembered as clearly as if it were yesterday how, on that morning after his talk with Foh Wong, he met Na Liu where they always met, in back of the Temple of the Monkey and the Stork, in the shelter of the enameled pagoda roof that mirrored the sun a thousand-fold, like intersecting rainbows, endless zigzag flashings of rose and purple and blue and green. There he told her what had happened, told her the full bitter tale; and he said to her as he had to Foh Wong:

"I do not fear death. But there is the honor of my father to be considered—the honor of my ancestors for countless generations."

"Pah!" she cried. "And what do I care for the honor of your father, the honor of all your noble ancestors? It is you I care for. You alone. And the thought of you dead—why, I cannot bear it. Because, you see"—her voice was thin and brittle—"I love you."

He was silent.

"I love you so," she continued. "There is nothing, nothing, nothing I would not do for the sake of my love. Ah"—in a tense whisper—"for the sake of my love, I would lie, I would steal, I would kill! For the sake of my love"—more loudly, with a queer triumph in her accents—"I shall marry another!"

He sighed. He spoke dully:

"The book has been read. The grape has been pressed. There is no more. This is the end of our love."

"The end? No, no! There can be no end to our love, as there was no beginning. Why—don't you see?—our love is a fact. A fact!"

He weighed the thought in his mind. Then he inclined his head.

"That is so," he replied. "A fact, like the living Buddha, eternal and unchangeable. A fact, whatever may happen to you and to me!"

THEY stood there. For long minutes they looked at each other. They did not touch hands. For was she not now betrothed to Foh Wong?

They turned and went their different ways. And a few days later Na Liu became the coolie's bride, while Yang Shen-Li traveled south, to be a captain in a Manchu banner corps and rise high in the favor of the Dowager Empress.

NA LIU was a faithful wife to Foh Wong, since it was her duty; obeying the ancient maxim that a married woman must first widen her tolerance, then control the impulses of her heart and body, then entirely correct herself.

He was a good husband to her. Nor did the notion of her loving Yang Shen-Li—he knew it, though they never spoke of it—disturb his massive Mongol equanimity. Indeed, he was conscious of a keener tang and zest to his passion when he reflected that the other was an aristocrat and he himself a despised mud-turtle; yet his the woman who might have had her luxurious ease in a mandarin's palace.

Still, there were moments when he was prey to a certain jealousy. Not jealousy of the flesh—how could that be, with Yang Shen-Li in Peking and Na Liu so rigidly observing the conventions? Jealousy, rather, of the brain, the imagining; of the gnawing, recurrent idea that, married to his rival, Na Liu would have lived in splendor of silks and jade, while as his own wife, her life was sordid and mean and frugal.

He would reason, thereby doing her an injustice, that she compared her existence, such as it was, with what it might have been. And it was less through love of her, and more because of this jealousy—this avid longing for material achievement, for precious things to put at her feet, telling her, "Behold! I can give you whatever the Manchu could have given you!"—that ambition came to him, that he dreamed of rising from his lowly estate to power and riches.

It was about this time that a Ninguta man returned to his native town, his pockets clanking with gold and amazing tales on his lips of the fair fortune awaiting the men of China in a land beyond the Pacific. America was its fantastic and barbarous name. And it seemed that the work there was plentiful, and the wages generous and princely.

Foh Wong listened to him eagerly. He asked many astute, practical questions. Presently, he made up his mind.

He sold his meager belongings. He took Na Liu to Canton, and crowded there aboard a Yankee clipper with a gang of his countrymen. And even before the ship warped out, he received his first taste of the New World's crass realities at the hands of the Gloucester mate, who, short of help, picked decidedly involuntary and as decidedly unpaid stevedores from among his Chinese passengers—

forcing them to labor all day, to shift cumbersome freight, to direct to the derricks the heavy slings of cargo, to toil for long hours with bleeding fingers and tired, aching bodies. Once Foh Wong, taking a breathing spell, said to Na Liu, who stood by the gunwale:

"Ah—hard, hard work! But it does not matter. For I shall succeed. No doubt of it." And in a whisper: "You want me to succeed?"

"Yes."

"You love me—a little bit?"

Her reply was hopeless in its honesty, hopeless in what it did not say:

"I shall be a faithful wife to you—always."

"But—"

He began to plead with her, when the Gloucester mate's bellow interrupted him:

"Cut out that Chinkie talk, yer yaller-skinned heathen—and git back to them derricks!"

And though Foh Wong did not understand the words, he had no trouble in understanding the length of knotted rope that whistled through the air.

Such was the beginning of his odyssey—which was destined to end, ironically, in a sweltering Pell Street garret, with the door locked and the windows tightly shuttered, and an agony of fear forever stewing in his soul. The beginning of his odyssey—almost as bitter as this same end—with all about him, stretching east toward San Francisco, the world of the sea, enigmatic and alien.

Slimy, brutish toil. Seasickness and wretched food and brackish water. The Gloucester mate cuffing and cursing him and his countrymen with a certain austere Puritan determination. Days with the waves house-high under a puffed and desolate sky. Nights of blackness flecked with white, and running back to a yet deeper blackness. Once a gale that shivered a mast into matchwood and swept the bridges clean as with a knife.

He was conscious of fear. But paradoxically, he was not afraid of his fear. For there was his ambition. There was his passion for Na Liu. There was, stronger than his passion, his hate of Yang Shen-Li. These sustained him too through the decades of heavy labor that followed.

First in California—California of the smashing, roaring, epic era. Gold was king then. Silver-lead was viceroy. Everywhere railroads were being pushed. There was timber. There was wheat. There were cattle ranches and orchards. There was the White Man's bragging:

"Give us the dollar! To hell with the cents! Let the Yellow Men earn 'em!"

The Yellow Men did. Among them, Foh Wong—striving desperately, year after year, living close to the danger line of starvation, in California, Arizona, Colorado, Chicago, at last reaching New York. Frugally hoarding his money, climbing up the ladder of success, until his was a name for shrewdness and solid riches to conjure with in Chinatown, and stout merchants, sipping their tea or smoking their opium-pipes on an afternoon at the Azure Dragon Club, would comment admiringly:

"Gold comes to his hand unasked—like a dog or a courtesan."

ONCE in a while Foh Wong had news of Yang Shen-Li. His friends would read in Canton papers, or in the local Chinatown weekly, the *Eminent Elevation*, owned and edited by Yung Tang, how the Manchu also was steadily making his way—how, a favorite of the Dowager Empress, he had been appointed captain-general of the Peking troops, commander-in-chief of the Northern army, and finally—this happened at the turn of the century, at about the same time when Foh Wong paid off the twenty-thousand-dollar mortgage on his Pell Street house—military governor of his native province.

With every rise in the other's fortunes, Foh Wong's ambition grew. His hate, expressed by his jealousy of material achievement, was not weakened by his own success, although in this thoughts of Na Liu no longer played a direct part.

He was still a good husband to her, in that he treated her with scrupulous politeness and presented her occasionally with expensive gifts. But his passion was dying. For several reasons. One—logically, inevitably—was that he had never been able to make her love him. Besides, she was getting to be an old woman. And—the gravest reason—she had borne him no children.

She, on the other hand, had not ceased to be his faithful wife: looking after his bodily comfort, making his home a thing of tidiness and beauty, cutting down household costs. Nor did she dislike him. Not at all. Indeed, it would be a hunting after lying, sentimental effect to say that she blamed him for having forced her into marriage. For she also was of Mongol race. She believed, to quote a Chinese proverb, that it was just and proper to take

by the tail what one could not take by the head; and she would have acted as Foh Wong had acted—in fact, did act so several years later—had the positions been reversed.

Therefore she gave him her respect. She even gave him a measure of friendship. But no love; she could not. She had not forgotten the Manchu; could never forget him.

So Foh Wong's love died. It became indifference. And then one day his indifference changed to hate, as blighting as his hate for Yang Shen-Li. . . .

On that day, coming home for lunch, he found his wife in tears. He asked her what was the matter. She did not answer, only sobbed.

He saw a crumpled letter on the floor. He picked it up, forced her to read it aloud to him. It was from her brother.

The latter wrote—for that was the time, after the death of the Dowager Empress, when revolution all over China was no longer the pale, frightened dream of a few idealists, but a fact that seared the land like a sheet of smoldering flame, yellow, cruel, inexorable—he wrote how in Ninguta, too, several months earlier, the masses had turned against their rulers, the iron-capped Manchu princes. He wrote vividly—and Foh Wong smiled as he pictured the grim scene.

THE mob of enraged coolies—*hayah!* his own people—racing through the streets, splashing through the thick blue slime, yelling:

"*Pao Ch'ing Mien Yong*—death to the foreign oppressors!"

Running on and on, like a huge snake with innumerable bobbing heads, mouths cleft into toothy cruel grimaces, crying:

"*Pao Ch'ing Mien Yong!*"

Rushing on through Pewter Lane. Through the Bazaar of the Tartar Traders. Past the Temple of the Monkey and the Stork. On to the palace of the military governor. Wielding hatchets and daggers and clubs and scythes. Overpowering the Manchu banner-men who fought bravely.

"*Pao Ch'ing Mien Yong!*"

Heads then—heads rolling on the ground like over-ripe pumpkins. Heads of Manchus, of foreign oppressors; and among them—doubtless, wrote Na Liu's brother, though it had not been found in the crimson shambles—the head of Yang Shen-Li.

Yang Shen-Li's head, thought Foh Wong—his

handsome, arrogant head!

He laughed. Then suddenly his laughter broke off—and staring at Na Liu, so wrinkled and faded and old, he said:

“I wish he had lost his head years ago, when I gave him the choice between losing it, and losing you. For had he chosen death, I would not have married you, O turtle-spawn!”



She did not reply. She kept on weeping. And then he beat her—partly because he hated her, and partly because her tears told him that she still loved the Manchu, loved his memory even after death. . . .

He left the room, the house.

He thought, with self-pity:

“Here I am, wealthy and powerful, and my loins still strong—and saddled with this ancient gnarled crone! *Hai! Hai!*”—as he saw three young Chinese girls crossing Pell Street arm in arm, with swaying hips and tiny mincing steps. “When there are so many soft, pretty buds waiting to be picked!”

He turned and looked. He knew one of them: Si-Si, the daughter of Yung Tang, editor of the *Eminent Elevation*.

Foh Wong did not care for the latter. The man, New York born and bred, was a conservative, an adherent of the former imperial regime, and had recently returned from China, whence he had sent articles, to his own and American papers, praising the Manchus and denouncing the revolutionaries as tools of the Bolsheviks.

Still, considered Foh Wong, his daughter was lovely. What an exquisite wife she would make! And he smacked his lips like a man sipping warm rice wine of rich bouquet. . . .

So time passed.

WHENEVER he thought of Si-Si, which was often, he beat his wife. And one day, at the Azure Dragon Club, stretched out on a mat, between them a table with opium-lamps, pipes and needles and ivory and horn boxes neatly arranged, he complained of his fate to Yung Tang, who inclined his head and spoke sententiously:

“Women are useless unless they be the mothers of our children.”

“That is so.”

“My own wife drinks—too much. She talks—too much. She spends—too much. But she has given birth to a daughter and three sons. Ah”—while with agile fingers he kneaded the brown poppy cube which the flame gradually changed to amber and gold—“better a drunken, nagging, extravagant wife who is fertile, than a virtuous one who is as barren as a mule.”

“Yes,” agreed Foh Wong. “Better a fat, dirty pig than a cracked jade cup.”

“Better,” the editor wound up the pleasant round of Mongol metaphor, “a fleet donkey than a hamstrung horse.”

For a while they smoked in silence. The fragrant, opalescent fumes rolled in sluggish clouds over the mats. Then Foh Wong asked:

“Your daughter Si-Si is, I understand, of marriageable age?”

“Indeed.”

“She is betrothed?”

“Not yet, O wise and older brother.” Faint amusement lit up Yung Tang’s purple-black eyes. “She is waiting for a proper man, a wealthy man.”

“I am wealthy.”

“I know.” Yung Tang pushed the warm bamboo pipe aside and substituted for it one of carved tortoise-shell with a turquoise tip and three yellow tassels. “She is devoted to her parents. She has given solemn oath to the Buddha the Adored, that she will not marry unless her husband invests—ah—twenty thousand dollars in my enterprise.”

Foh Wong stared at the other. He knew that—thanks to the weekly’s freely expressed pro-Manchu attitude, contrary to that of Pell Street which, being coolie, was mostly revolutionary—its circulation and advertising had dropped; that therefore the editor was in awkward financial straits.

“Or, perhaps, fifteen thousand dollars?” he suggested.

“Or rather—nineteen?”



Foh Wong kowtowed deeply before the Buddha who looks after the souls of those about to die—for he was sorry for the destiny in store for his faded old wife, Na Liu.

"Sixteen and a half thousand is a goodly sum, the more so as I—should I give it—would be going counter to my political principles. It would mean a loss of face to me."

"While, to me, it would mean a loss of face to accept money from a man who does not see eye to eye with me when it comes to China's future. Thus—eighteen thousand dollars. Personally I dislike bargaining."

THE editor smoked two pipes one after the other. He continued:

"It is wretched manners to praise your own, I know. But it has been remarked by certain people—truthful people, I believe—that Si-Si is a precious casket filled with the arts of coquetry, that when she washes her hands she scents the water, that her seventeen summers have only increased her charms seventeen times, and that"—calmly—"her hips are wide enough to bear many men children."

Foh Wong sighed.

"My own wife," he replied, "is a fallow field. There is none of my seed in the world to pray for me after death. Not that I blame her. Still—it is written in the Book of Meng Tzeu that she who cannot fulfill her charge must resign it."

"You mean divorce?"

"No."

"No?" echoed the editor, looking up sharply. "But a second wife is not permitted in this country."

Foh Wong turned on his mat. He glanced through the window, up at the sky where the sun was gazing in the west like a great red door.

"Divorce," was his answer, "is a custom of coarse-haired barbarians. Besides—a law of these same barbarians—alimony would have to be paid. Expensive—eh?"

"Very expensive."

"Not that I am stingy." Foh Wong spoke with sincerity. "For my wife, should her soul jump the dragon gate, would have a splendid funeral. She would be buried in a large and comfortable red-lacquer coffin, on the side of a hill facing running water, and with an elegant view over the rice paddies."

"Her spirit," commented Yung Tang, "would doubtless enjoy itself."

"Doubtless."

BOTH men were silent. The editor was caressing his cheek with his right hand. The dying crimson sunlight danced and glittered on his highly polished fingernails. He thought of a man whom he had talked to, and who had given his confidence, a few months back, during his visit to China; thought of the queer mission with which this man had entrusted him; thought how, fantastically, sardonically, fate can work its will—fate that ambles out of the dark like a blind camel, with no warning, no jingling of bells.

He smiled at the other, who, having emptied his pipe at one long-drawn inhalation, looked up and asked a casually worded question:

"I believe you have a cousin who is a hatchetman?"

"Yes. But—" The editor hesitated.

"His prices are exorbitant?"

"They would not be—to me. Only, I have discovered that it is one's relatives whom one must trust least."

"Just so."

"I have a friend in Seattle. I shall communicate with him. I shall act slowly, discreetly. I shall think right and think left. There is no especial hurry."

"Except"—courteously—"my desire for Si-Si."

"Another summer will increase her charms eighteen times." Yung Tang pointed at the table. "Will you smoke?"

"No more. I have a duty to attend to. You will write to Seattle?"

"Immediately."

But the editor did not write to Seattle. He wrote, instead, to Hongkong; and he began his letter with a quotation from Confucius which said:

*"The man who is departing on a sad journey often leaves his heart under the door—to find it on his return."*

He smiled as he dipped his brush into the inkpot; and it is worthwhile remembering that the Chinese ideographs *sin* (heart) and *Menn* (door), when placed one above the other and read together, make a third word, "*Melancholy*"—which latter, by a peculiar Mongol twist, is considered an equivalent of "*eternal love*." And he wrote on while Foh Wong, having left the Azure Dragon Club, entered the joss temple around the corner.

There, without the slightest hypocrisy, he kowtowed deeply before the Buddha of the

Paradise of the West—the Buddha who looks after the souls of those about to die—and burned three sweet-smelling *hun-shuh* incense sticks in honor of his wife. For once he had loved her. And he was sorry for the destiny in store for her. So, from this day on, he stopped beating her. On the contrary, he was kind to her—brought her presents of flowers and fruit, treated her—with no irony intended—as if she were an invalid not long for this world. And almost every evening he visited the joss temple; always he made kowtow before the Buddha and burned incense sticks—until Yu Ch'ang, the priest, declared that few men on Pell Street could compare to him in piety and rectitude.

N EAR the end of the year, Yung Tang reported to him that the matter was progressing satisfactorily. His friend in Seattle had secured the services of a hatchetman.

His name, said the editor, was Kang Kee. He had been a warlord fallen upon evil days. Therefore, thanks to his former profession, there was no doubt of his being a skilled and efficient killer; and given the fact that he was a stranger with no local tong affiliations, there was no doubt of his discretion.

"When will he be here?" asked Foh Wong eagerly.

Yung Tang shrugged his shoulders.

Kang Kee, he explained, was still in Hongkong; and surely, Foh Wong knew that times had changed since he himself had come to America. For there was now the law called the Asiatic Exclusion Act, to circumvent which the Chinese aspirant after Yankee coin had to travel many thorny roundabout roads and spend exorbitant "squeezes" right and left. Would Foh Wong, therefore, pay fifteen hundred dollars on account, to be deducted, later on, from Kang Kee's price of five thousand?

The merchant grumbled, protested, finally went to the safe and counted out the money.

"I would like a receipt," he said curtly. After all, he went on, he was a businessman. Here was a job for which he was paying. "Not that"—with grim humor—"I want you to particularize the—ah—nature of the job."

YUNG TANG smiled. His smile, had Foh Wong noticed it, was queerly triumphant.

"I understand," he said. "Just a few words acknowledging the money for—well, services to be



rendered. . . . How's that? I shall make it out in duplicate."

"In duplicate?"—rather astonished.

"Yes. One for you, and one for me, as agent for Kang Kee." With quick brushstrokes he wrote paper and copy, handed both to the other. "Will you look it over?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Foh Wong. "It is not necessary."

The editor's smile deepened. He knew that the merchant, in spite of his wealth, had never learned to read, that he carried the intricate details of his business transactions in his shrewd old brain, that he could just barely scrawl his name, but that for fear of losing face, he had never owned up to it. Besides—and here too Yung Tang saw through him—Foh Wong figured that the editor had no reason to cheat him. For though Si-Si was young and beautiful and desirable, there were few men in Chinatown willing and able to pay the eighteen thousand dollars which her father demanded and in fact—Foh Wong knew, having made inquiries here and there—needed desperately; and he had made assurance doubly sure by buying up, at a generous discount, a number of Yung Tang's overdue notes.

He lit a cigarette, while the other signed the original and said:

"Will you countersign the copy?"

"What for? You received the money, not I."

"I know. But—it would make the deal more binding."

Foh Wong was puzzled. Make the deal more binding? He did not understand. Still, doubtless Yung Tang knew what he was talking about. He was a literatus, a learned gentleman; and the merchant, for all his success, was at heart the coolie who had never lost his respect for educated people. And—again the thought—the man needed him, could have no reason to cheat him.

"Very well." He dipped brush in inkpot, and clumsily painted his signature. "Here you are."

Even so, he felt relieved when, in the course of the afternoon, he dropped in on Ng Fat, the banker, and found out, by discreet questioning, that Yung Tang had bought a draft for fifteen hundred dollars made out to one Kang Kee, a former warlord residing in Hongkong.

**I**NDEED the latter—whose American odyssey was destined to be quite as hard as that of Foh Wong, decades earlier—needed every cent of the

fifteen hundred dollars. To enumerate all those whom he had to bribe would be to give an ethnographical survey of many of the Far East's more gaudy rogues.

But let us pick out a few.

There was, in Shanghai, a Kansuh ruffian on whose shaven poll had been a blood-price ever since the Boxer affair, and who met the former warlord and thirty other prospective emigrants in a first-chop chandoo place west of the To Kao Tien Temple. There was, furthermore, a squint-eyed Lithuanian skipper, wanted for murder in Riga and for piracy in Pernambuco, who took them to Vladivostok and into the tranquil presence of a Nanking compradore with gold-encased fingernails and a charming taste in early Ming porcelain. This gentleman passed the adventurers through yet two more middlemen to a Japanese captain who flaunted British naturalization papers and called himself O'Duffy Ichiban.

He was supposed to clear directly for Seattle. But he managed to cruise off the British Columbia coast—"contrary head winds, half a gale," he wrote in his log, and lied—until a narrow-flanked clipper shot out from the fogs of Queen Charlotte Sound and took away the living freight, drowning no more than seven. The remainder had an interview, next morning, with a government inspector who—hating himself for it—drowned his conscience in his greed.

Then a stormy night. A motorboat chugging recklessly across the Straits of San Juan de Fuca. A dumping overboard into the swirling, greasy sea half a mile from land. A screaming wave that swallowed all the merry band of Mongol rovers with the exception of the former warlord. . . . His swim ashore. And at last, his strong hand reaching out from the water and gripping the slippery piles at the foot of Yeslerway, in the city of Seattle. . . .

Seattle in spring.

Spring, too, in New York.

Spring brushing into Pell Street on gauzy pinions. Hovering birdlike over sordid, tarred rooftops. Dropping liquid silver over the toil of the streets, adding music to the strident calls of pavement and gutter.

Spring in the heart of Foh Wong—to whom, that morning, the editor had said that he had received a telegram from the hatchetman. The latter would be here on Saturday—would seek out the merchant immediately upon his arrival, at nine in

the evening.

So, on Saturday afternoon, Foh Wong entered the joss temple. There he attended to his religious duties more thoroughly and unctuously than usual. Not only did he make kowtow to the Buddha of the Paradise of the West. He also kowtowed seven times to the Buddha of the Light Without Measure, and nine times to the purple-faced Goddess of Mercy. He heaped the bowls in front of the idols with dry rice. He burned twenty-seven incense sticks. He made the rounds of the temple, bowing right and left, beating gongs, ringing a small silver bell. He paid the priest a handsome sum to exorcise whatever evil spirits might be about.

FINALLY, his soul at rest, he went home. He presented his wife with gifts, thinking shrewdly that Si-Si would enjoy them after Na Liu's demise—an expensive radio set, a robe of purple satin embroidered with tiny butterflies, a pair of coral-and-jade earrings and a precious Suen-tih vase.

Na Liu smiled. She said:

"You have made me very happy these last few months."

"Have I?"

"Yes," she agreed; "by forgetting your anger against me, your just and righteous anger. For, you see, I have been a bad wife. I have never loved you. I have grown old and ugly. And I have borne you no children."

"Three things which only fate can help," he replied quite gently.

"Fate is bitter."

"Fate, at times"—as he thought of Si-Si—"is sweet. Let us not blame fate." He interrupted himself as there was a loud knocking at the street door below. "A friend whom I expect," he explained, and hurried out.

He reached the shop, crossed it, threw open the door. A man stood there—tall, broad, a black handkerchief concealing all his features but the hard, staring eyes.

"Upstairs," whispered Foh Wong. "The first room to the left."

The stranger inclined his head without speaking. Noiselessly he mounted. He disappeared.

There was a pall of heavy, oppressive silence—suddenly broken by a sob that quickly gurgled out. And Foh Wong trembled a little, felt a cold shiver along his spine—saw, a minute or two later, the

man return.

He asked:

"Is it—finished, O hatchetman?"

"Yes. It is finished, O mud-turtle."



"Is it—finished, O hatchetman?" Foh Wong asked; and the stranger replied: "It is finished, O mud-turtle." Then the merchant gave a shriek of fear. That voice!

THEN the merchant gave a shriek of surprise and fear. Why—that nasal, metallic voice so well remembered! The voice of Yang Shen-Li! And as the other tore off the black handkerchief—the face of Yang Shen-Li! Older, much older. But still the bold, aquiline nose, the high cheekbones that seemed to give beneath the pressure of the leathery, copper-red skin, the compressed, sardonic lips brushed by the drooping mandarin mustache, the combative chin. . . .

“But you,” Foh Wong stammered ludicrously, “—you died—in Ninguta!”

“And I came to life again,” was the drawling answer, “as Kang Kee, the warlord. Kang Kee, who last year forged a chain of strong and exquisite friendship with one Yung Tang, who was visiting China. Kang Kee—no longer a warlord, but a hatchetman come here for the sake of a small killing.”

“A killing,” cried Foh Wong, rapidly collecting his wits, “for which you will lose your head.”

He had decided what he was going to do. Outside somewhere, on Pell Street or Mott, his friend Bill, detective of Second Branch, would be walking his beat. He would call him, would tell him that his wife had been murdered. He was about to run out—stopped as he heard the other’s drawling words:

“Not so fast, mud-turtle! You spoke of my losing my head. And what of your own head?”

“You killed, not I.”

“You hired me.”

“Prove it!”

LEISURELY, from his loose sleeve, the Manchu drew a paper—the paper which a few months earlier, Foh Wong had signed on the editor’s request—and which Yang Shen-Li now read aloud:

*“Herewith, for the sum of five thousand dollars, I employ Kang Kee to kill my wife—”*

Foh Wong grew pale. He stared at the Manchu, who stared back. There was in their eyes the old hate that had never weakened. Alone they were with this searing, choking hate. The outer world and its noises seemed very far away. There was just a memory of street cries lifting their lean, starved arms; just a memory of river wind chasing the night clouds that clawed at the moon with cool, slim fingers of silver and white.

Then the Manchu spoke:

“If I lose my head, you lose yours. Only—I am not afraid of losing mine, being a brave man, an iron-capped prince; whereas you, O coolie, are—”

“A coward,” the other said dully.

“Precisely. But brave man and coward shall be united in death. Together our souls shall jump the dragon gate.” Yang Shen-Li turned toward the door. “I shall now go to the police of the coarse-haired barbarians, and—”

“Wait!”

“Yes?”

Unconsciously, Foh Wong used the words which, decades ago, in Ninguta, the Manchu had used:

“Is there a price for your silence?”

“There is.”

“How much?”

“Everything,” announced the Manchu, sitting down, slipping a little fan from his sleeve and opening it slowly. . . .

He had not arrived tonight, he related, but twenty-four hours earlier. He had spent the time with Yung Tang, talking over the whole matter with him, and making certain arrangements. For instance, bribing a Chinese doctor who would certify that Foh Wong had died—of heart failure.

“You,” the merchant whispered, “you mean to—”

“Kill you? Not at all. Did I not tell you there is a price for my silence? And would your life be the price? No, no! Your life is sacred to me.”

“Then?”

“Listen!” Yang Shen-Li went on to explain that, with the help of the physician’s certificate, Na Liu would be buried as Foh Wong, while it would be given out that she had gone to China on a lengthy visit. “Clever—don’t you think?” he smiled.

“But what will happen to me? How, if I’m supposed to be dead and buried, can I show my face?”

“You can’t,” said the Manchu grimly. “You will live in the garret of your house until death—may it not be for many years! You will see nobody—except me. You will speak to nobody—except to me. Nobody will know that you are among the living—nobody except me and Yung Tang. This shall be a bond between you and me. The moment you break it, I shall go to the police and—”

“But my business—my money—”

“I shall look after it. For before—shall I say?—your death, you shall have made a will—you are

going to sign it presently—making me trustee of your estate for your absent wife. You will leave her your whole fortune—all, that is, save eighteen thousand dollars—make it thirty-eight thousand—which you will leave to Yung Tang. . . . *Hayah!*”—as the other began to plead and argue. “Be quiet, coolie! For today I command—and you will obey!”

AND thus it is Foh Wong is cooped up in the sweltering garret of his Pell Street house, with the door locked and the windows tightly shuttered, and an agony of fear forever stewing in his brain. It

is thus that Yang Shen-Li is lording it gloriously over Foh Wong’s clerks, spending Foh Wong’s money recklessly; and in the evening, after a pleasant hour or two at the Azure Dragon Club, mounting to the second floor, bowing courteously to his wrinkled old wife and asking her:

“Moonbeam, was there ever love as staunch as ours?”

Always she gives a quaint, giggling, girlish little laugh. And at times, hearing the echo of it, Foh Wong wonders—then forgets his wonder in his fear.