

In Shanghai Alley

By
Lemuel De Bra

*Sinister shadows, a flashing knife,
and Chinatown had settled its score
of hatred.*

CHONG'S slant eyes narrowed as he studied the white man who faced him across the teakwood table in the Oriental's sumptuous quarters. Chong Kee, ex-gunman, smuggler, dealer in opium and slave girls, had many reasons to hate—and fear—the police.

"It's a cinch, Chong," argued Cartwright. "This guy doesn't know Chinatown; and he's asked me to put him hep to some mud. He's got five thou' to invest. See? He figures on going up the river and making a cleanup."

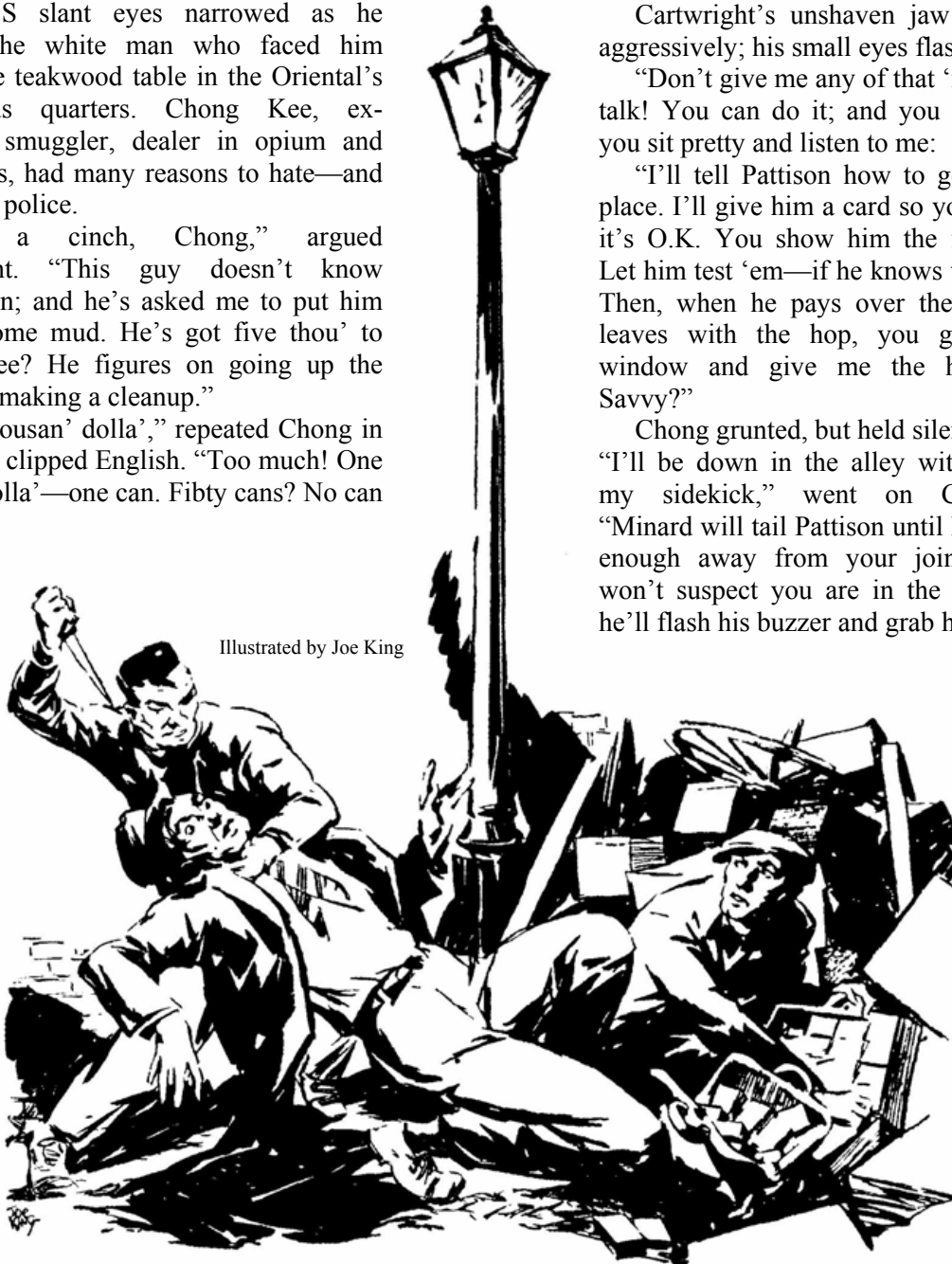
"Fi' t'ousan' dolla'," repeated Chong in his harsh, clipped English. "Too much! One hunna' dolla'—one can. Fibty cans? No can do!"

Cartwright's unshaven jaw went out aggressively; his small eyes flashed.

"Don't give me any of that 'no can do' talk! You can do it; and you will. Now you sit pretty and listen to me:

"I'll tell Pattison how to get to your place. I'll give him a card so you'll know it's O.K. You show him the fifty cans. Let him test 'em—if he knows that much. Then, when he pays over the coin and leaves with the hop, you go to that window and give me the high sign. Savvy?"

Chong grunted, but held silent. "I'll be down in the alley with Minard, my sidekick," went on Cartwright. "Minard will tail Pattison until he gets far enough away from your joint that he won't suspect you are in the deal; then he'll flash his buzzer and grab him.



Illustrated by Joe King

A naked blade caught the faint gleam of the street lamp, glittered an instant, then vanished.

"Minard will claim to be a Federal prohibition agent. He will call Pattison by some other name and accuse him of having liquor in the suitcase. About that time Pattison will be wishing it was liquor—anything but opium. See? He'll be so scared of going to the pen, he'll drop the suitcase and beat it.

"There's where the fine-work comes in. Minard will pretend to chase Pattison; but of course, he can't go far lugging that suitcase of opium. When he is sure Pattison is out of the neighborhood, Minard will connect with me. *And I'll bring all your opium right back to you.* Get it?

"In return, you give me four thousand of the money Pattison pays you. You make a thousand clear; me and Minard split the rest. What say?"

Chong's yellow face was as expressionless as a stone.

"You still in P'lice Depa'tment?" he inquired casually.

"Sure. But don't let that bother you. I ain't framin' anything—on you."

Chong took a Chinese cigarette from a pocket of his blouse, lighted it with a steady hand.

"A' right," he concluded, without enthusiasm. "Pattison come leben o'clock. I have op'um leddy. Pattison pay fi' t'ousan' dolla'. He take my op'um. You bling my op'um back. I kip one t'ousan'. Gib you fo' t'ousan'. A'right. I sabby."

Cartwright arose. He tossed his cigarette-stub into the sand and ash of a huge brass censer that stood on the floor by the desk.

"One thing more, Chong: How will you signal me when the deal is over? Come to think of it, you'd better not show up at that window."

The Chinaman's narrowed eyes darted swiftly around the elegantly furnished room and came to rest on the heavily figured Cantonese hanging that draped the window indicated by Cartwright.

"I tell you. I leeb little light showin' at window all time. See? When Pattison pay money, Ah Sin will shut off lights. Then Ah Sin quick make 'em light again. Sabby?"

"Good enough," agreed Cartwright. "I'll watch the window."

THE door closed behind the white man. For a moment Chong stood still, listening; then he glided swiftly to the censer, bent over and grasped it by the turned edges. To all appearances the censer was a massive affair of hammered brass.

The huge bowl appeared to be full of sand in which stood nine sticks of burning punk. Chong, however, lifted the bowl with surprising ease, revealing the figure of a Chinese sitting on the rug, his head bent in a listening attitude, his arms clasped around his knees.

Chong spoke now in rapid Cantonese:

"Ah Sin, did you listen sharp?"

"I heard everything," replied Ah Sin, springing to his feet like a cat. "It's a clever scheme."

Chong grunted. "It's a clever trap," he said laconically.

Ah Sin blinked, but made no reply to this.

"A foreign devil who is false to his own people will not be true to us," said the old smuggler. "Cartwright told me that he is still in the employ of the police. He lied. Detectives Cartwright and Minard were dismissed this morning for good reasons. They were caught selling opium that had been seized as evidence."

"*Haie!*" breathed Ah Sin in sudden alarm. "Then, of course, you will have nothing to do with this man's scheme!"

Chong's brow lowered in a black scowl. "Cartwright is a dangerous man," he said thoughtfully. "I am afraid to cross him. Also I am afraid to go on with his scheme. Whichever way I turn, I am in danger. I see no way out. However, it is written that a bamboo fence seen at a distance appears impregnable, while on closer view one may find an opening. *Tsau kom lok!*"



IT was exactly eleven o'clock by Chong's gold watch when Dan Pattison rapped on the door. Chong admitted him. Neither spoke until the door had been closed again. Pattison, unacquainted as he was with Chinatown, nevertheless had the sure manner of the crook who plays only when he thinks he has protection. For a moment he eyed the old smuggler with an air of superiority that bordered on insolence. Then he handed Chong a card.

"Who gib you this?" queried Chong politely.

Pattison's lips curled. "Get busy and cut the talk. You see the card, don't you?"

Chong nodded his approval. He tore the card to bits and tossed them into the ash tray. Then he drew one of the hangings aside, disclosing a large wall-safe. He opened the safe and brought out a small brown suitcase.

Chong set the suitcase on the table and opened it. Inside, arranged in neat order were fifty cans, each about twice the size of an ordinary deck of playing cards. On each can was a label bearing Chinese characters that meant nothing to Pattison. To Chong they spelled: "No. 1, Smoking Opium, Macao."

THE white man selected three of the cans, pried up the lids and smelled the black, gummy contents. Then he dipped up a small quantity on the end of a match, heated it over the flame of another match, and held his nostrils over the white vapor.

"All right, Chinky," said Pattison. He drew out a roll of bills and began counting them.

Chong watched the count, meanwhile repacking and closing the suitcase.

"Here is the money," said Pattison.

"Here is your op'um," said Chong.

Then—the lights went out.

There was an instant of darkness. The lights came on again.

Chong picked up the pile of bills. Pattison took the brown suitcase, and left.

The opium dealer was putting the money in the safe when Ah Sin entered. Chong closed the safe and went quickly to the teakwood table. He opened the drawer and took out a Chinese dagger with a short but wickedly curved blade.

"Take this," he said to Ah Sin. "Be on your way quickly. And remember: if you strike a tiger and do not kill him, you become his prey!"

IN Shanghai Alley, behind a pile of old tea-boxes, two men bent over a small brown suitcase.

"Dead easy!" chuckled Minard. "Pattison was so scared I bet he is running yet. When he reads nothing of this in the papers, he'll do some tall guessing, eh?"

"Let 'em all guess!" growled Cartwright. "Tonight we clean up and blow for good. Get that other package open!"

"Here it is," said Minard.

"Good!" Cartwright chuckled. "Now, out of the little brown bag comes Chong's fifty cans of good opium. Into the little brown bag goes our fifty opium cans filled with axle-grease with a thin layer of opium on top."

Minard laughed.

"I'll take the suitcase with the fifty cans of

grease up to Chong," went on Cartwright. "I'll collect the four thousand dollars. Then I'll come right back here. Four thousand dollars, and fifty cans of opium—not so bad for a night's work, eh?"

"Not so bad," agreed Minard, "—if Chong doesn't get wise."

"Chong's a fool," said Cartwright. "He might open a can, look at it, smell it; but he won't bother to dig into it. The cans look all alike, so he won't suspect. It'll be bad for his health if he does. Get me?"

"I get you," replied Minard. He took the package Cartwright gave him, and turned to leave.

Behind him, he heard a sudden startled gasp. He whirled. A shadowy figure had leaped upon Cartwright. A naked blade, short but wickedly curved, caught the faint gleam of the street lamp at the end of the alley, glittered for an instant, then vanished. There was the dull sound of a blow, a hideous, gurgling moan. Then—silence.

Minard fled.

"SO that was it!" Chong rumbled into the mouthpiece of his long-stemmed pipe. "They robbed Pattison, and intended to swindle me with cans of axle-grease!"

"Sir, that is correct!" cried Ah Sin, greatly agitated. "And now I must tell you how wretchedly I have failed. I brought you only the brown suitcase with the fifty cans of grease. Minard escaped with your fifty cans of opium!"

"Haie!" cried Chong. "You were very careless!"

"I did my best, sir. I had no chance at Minard. He got away while I was—ah—taking care of Cartwright."

"Will Cartwright bother us any more?"

"The dead do not trouble the living," said Ah Sin solemnly.

"Then," said Chong, "you have done well enough. As for Minard—well, this afternoon when I had smoked my four pipes of opium I saw a way out of Cartwright's trap. I made ready. When you turned off the lights to signal Cartwright, I switched my suitcase of opium for another exactly like it that I had ready on that stool beneath the table.

"So, after all, it is very funny. My opium is still there in the safe. I have the five thousand dollars. Cartwright will bother us no more. And Minard is running away with fifty opium cans *full of black molasses!*"