

*A Sixty-four Dollar Question—Who Can Figure Out  
What a Chinaman Will Do?*



## THE HUNGRY MANDARIN

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IT WAS Sergeant O'Hara of the Chinatown Squad who first called him "the Hungry Mandarin." His name, it appeared later, was Yuan Tah, a man of mystery whose unheralded arrival in the Yellow Quarter had created a nine days' curiosity among his slant-eyed

compatriots.

In the beginning nothing more was known about Yuan Tah than was visible to the naked eye. He was fat—enormously fat. And he was wealthy—it was apparent from his lordly manner of living that his purse was as well filled as his stomach.

Also Yuan Tah had a legendary appetite worthy of both bulging paunch and swollen purse.

Every night the Hungry Mandarin dined in solitary splendor at the Little Shanghai Restaurant on Mulberry Lane, and as word spread about the truly epic proportions of his appetite, the Chinese restaurant was crowded to capacity by curious yellow men each night at the hour of rice.

Now the quality of the cooking at the Little Shanghai was worthy of all this added patronage, but Soon Yet, the proprietor, was well aware that these extra customers came primarily to watch the slant-eyed gourmand at table, as though it were a performance in the Old China Playhouse, half a block away.

Not, indeed, that the Hungry Mandarin courted public attention to his gastronomic feats. No vulgar or baseborn eye was ever permitted to watch him ply hornspoon and ivory chopsticks. As soon as he was escorted to his reserved booth, Yuan Tah always signaled to his waiter, whereupon a four-panel dragon-screen was set up around his table to insure him privacy.

But the curious Sons of Han continued to crowd into the Little Shanghai, fascinated by Yuan Tah's epic appetite and lordly manner of dining, staring intently at the dragon-screen and making low-voiced bets as to the exact number of dishes that would be comprised in Yuan Tah's dinner.

"Who is this mandarin of mystery?" the yellow men whispered among themselves. "Whence does he come, and why does he tarry within our midst? He speaks to no one, holding himself aloof as a stone lion and silent as a Ming tomb."

And Sergeant O'Hara, with a somewhat different choice of words, was asking himself these same questions. O'Hara had dropped in one night at the

Little Shanghai for a look-see at this slant-eyed stranger whose gargantuan appetite was so talked about, and had returned there again and again, driven by a vague but persistent curiosity.

"What's the big idea, Sarge?" Detective Faraday, his assistant, asked. "All you talk about lately is this Hungry Mandarin, as you call him. And every night you're over at the Little Shanghai, watching him eat."

"It's quite a thing to watch, Faraday," O'Hara replied. "You've never seen anything like it. Last night, for instance, Yuan Tah's menu ran like this: ong dong soup, a whole Canton duck with side dishes of pork fat and pickled fish, five vegetables, half a dozen pots of royal jasmine tea, a big bowl of leechee nuts, and a bottle of tiger-bone wine."

Faraday grinned. "Well, there's no law against a big appetite, is there?"

Sergeant O'Hara frowned at the large-scale map of Chinatown hanging on his office wall. "Faraday, there's something queer about that fat Chink. Every time I see him it rings a little buzzer in my brain. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it's there, all right."

"Another one of your famous hunches, eh, Sarge?" the detective chuckled. "Well, if you ask me, I'd say the whole thing is a publicity stunt to draw a little extra business to the Little Shanghai. All the Chinks flock there to watch the Hungry Mandarin put on his act—Soon Yet makes a nice extra profit, and his high-hat stooge gets paid off with free meals."

O'Hara shook his head. "That was my first idea about it, Faraday. In fact, I put it pointblank to Soon Yet, but he assured me he'd never laid eyes on Yuan Tah before, and I believe he was telling the truth."

"Well, what do you expect to do about it?" Faraday asked.

"Watch—and wait," O'Hara declared.

"There's an old Chinese saying: 'Time holds the key to every lock.'"

SO Sergeant O'Hara watched the Hungry Mandarin—and waited. Yuan Tah had taken lodgings in Lantern Court, and rumor declared they were furnished in a luxurious style worthy of a true white-button mandarin. But Yuan continued aloof and solitary in his habits.

"How are you making out with your Hungry Mandarin, Sarge?" Faraday asked. "Do you still think you've got a hot hunch?"

O'Hara shrugged. "I'm still keeping my eye on him. Apparently he never leaves his lodgings except for his evening meal at the Little Shanghai, or for a game of fan-tan at Mark Sin's House of Chance in Paradise Court."

"Yes, I've heard rumors about those games," Faraday declared. "All-night sessions in Mark Sin's private office—at a dollar a point. The Chink is just as high-hat in his gambling as he is at his eating."

"I think I'll have a little talk with Mark Sin," O'Hara announced.

"A lot of good that'll do you," Faraday predicted. "You don't suppose Mark Sin would be stupid enough to spill anything about this Number One customer, do you?"

But the next day Sergeant O'Hara stationed himself near the Plum Blossom Joss House on Orange Street, knowing that Mark Sin came there daily at the hour of high sun to burn a packet of paper prayers at the shrine of Liu Hai, the Money God. And presently Mark Sin came bobbing along on felt-soled slippers.

"Hello, Mark," O'Hara said, stepping out of his doorway as the moon-faced gambler was starting up the brownstone steps of the joss house.

"*Ala wah*, Sah-jin," Mark Sin replied, with a polite bow.

"I want a word with you," O'Hara said, "about your friend Yuan Tah."

"Yuan Tah?" Mark Sin echoed slowly, as if he had never heard the name before. "Know nothing, Sah-jin."

"That's strange," O'Hara said evenly, pulling a small notebook from his pocket and flipping over the pages. "According to my records, Yuan Tah visited your house in Paradise Court on the night of the 8th—10th—11th—14th—"

Mark Sin bowed before the inevitable. "It is true, Sah-jin. Yuan Tah sometimes honors my unworthy house with his presence. We meet together to discuss the poems of Li Po."

"That's a new name for fan-tan!" O'Hara said drily.

The slant-eyed gambler gave a bland smile. "*Hoya!* Is it expected that a man shall bear witness against himself, Sah-jin? Is it not known to all that games of chance are forbidden by the Rice Face Law?"

Sergeant O'Hara gave him a level look. "Mark, we speak here as strangers," he said, which is the Chinatown formula for saying "This is strictly off the record."

"*Wah!*" Mark Sin replied. "Now we may speak with open words as plain as black writing upon rice paper. What do you seek to know about Yuan Tah?"

"I want to know who he is," O'Hara said, "and where he's from, and what he's doing here."

"These are questions easily answered," Mark Sin declared. "Yuan Tah is a wealthy silk merchant from a distant city. He has come to our streets in search of a much-cherished daughter named An-ling who has run away with a worthless, rascally clerk called Wang Kai."

"What makes him think they came here?" O'Hara asked.

"I do not know," Mark Sin answered. "Yuan Tah travels from city to city,

seeking them. They will be hard to find, because An-ling helped herself with a liberal hand to her father's cash before their secret flight. Also she has cut off her length of hair and dressed herself in man's attire. These matters will soon be known to all, Sah-jin, for Yuan Tah is preparing a painted notice to be posted in a public place. He will offer a reward of five hundred Rice Face dollars for any news concerning their whereabouts."

"Why didn't he turn the whole matter over to the police in the first place?" O'Hara asked. "If he had, notice would have gone out to every Chinatown in the country within an hour after their flight."

MARK SIN shrugged. "Yuan Tah does not understand the Rice Face Law, Sah-jin. Also he does not like to make talk with strangers. He suffers from a lameness of tongue, and he does not wish that others should laugh and make jokes about his slowness of speech."

"Tell him to come in and see me at the Precinct, Mark," O'Hara said. "Tell him we'll do everything we can to help him trace his daughter."

"It is advice I have already given," the gambler replied. "I tell you Yuan Tah that you are Number One friend to all Sons of Han, but he shake his head and say '*Pu yao*—not want.' It is family matter, Sah-jin."

So Sergeant O'Hara went away, turning over Mark Sin's story in his mind. If Yuan Tah had an impediment of speech, it would explain much of his aloof silence and haughty isolation.

And within a day or two Yuan Tah's painted notice did indeed appear on the south wall of Long Jon's Tea House on Mulberry Lane, which had long served as Chinatown's official bulletin board. When O'Hara went to Long Jon's to see it for himself, he found a circle of chattering

yellow men gathered around the notice, eagerly discussing this latest development in the story of Yuan Tah, the Mysterious.

Yuan Tah's notice was written down in dual scripts—in the vernacular *pai hua*, and in scholarly mandarin. Within an hour Sergeant O'Hara had a typed translation of the notice from John Lum, the court interpreter. The details set forth in Yuan Tah's notice were exactly as related by Mark Sin, except that a detailed description of the runaway couple had been added.

"Well, Sarge, there goes your mystery," Faraday said. "That was one hunch of yours that didn't pan out."

"Oh, I don't know," O'Hara said slowly. "When I get a hunch, Faraday, it dies hard."

Faraday grinned. "Maybe you think the story about a runaway daughter is phony, huh?"

"Well, it sounds all right," O'Hara admitted, "but I still feel there's something queer about Yuan Tah. Look, Faraday—he sleeps all day, and he's up all night. He never goes anywhere except to the Little Shanghai and to Mark Sin's fan-tan game. That's a damned peculiar way to hunt for a missing daughter."

"You're forgetting the notice," Faraday pointed out. "That a five-hundred-dollar reward'll save Yuan Tah a lot of leg work. If Yuan's daughter and that clerk are hiding out anywhere in our Chinatown, they'll be turned up quick enough. Five hundred bucks is a lot of money down here."

"On the other hand," O'Hara said quietly, "it doesn't cost much to offer five hundred dollars reward for news of a missing daughter—if the daughter doesn't exist."

Faraday looked at him. "But why should he play a game of ring-around-the-rosy?"

"Maybe it's because he's noticed me tailing him around," O'Hara said. "Maybe he wants to sidetrack my interest in him."

Faraday shook his head. "You're a hard loser, Sarge."

O'Hara was silent a moment, drumming his fingers on the desk. "Faraday, did you ever get a good look at Yuan Tah?"

The detective said, "Only that one night we saw him waddling across Lantern Court. It was too dark for me to see much, except that he was plenty fat. I never go to the Little Shanghai—you know I don't like Chinese chow."

"Well, come along and have dinner with me there tonight," O'Hara proposed. "Then you can have a good look-see at Yuan Tah."

"Okay," Faraday shrugged. "I guess I can stand Chink grub for one night."

"You may be surprised," O'Hara smiled. "The Little Shanghai isn't one of those fake chop suey joints. After you've packed away one of Soon Yet's dinners you may change your mind about Chinese cooking."

**D**ARKNESS came early that evening from a sullen, overcast sky. A spattering of raindrops greeted them as they left the Precinct and started for Mulberry Lane, Chinatown's principal thoroughfare.

Arrived at the Little Shanghai, Sergeant O'Hara picked out a table for two against the south wall. The opposite wall was lined with high-backed booths. The booth at the far end of the row had a hanging Chinese lantern of yellow silk and a low-curtained window looking out on a quiet sideyard garden.

"That, Faraday, is Yuan Tah's private roost," O'Hara explained. "It's reserved for him every night—with a special waiter assigned to him alone. He dines in style,

all right."

They were no sooner seated than paunchy old Soon Yet, the proprietor, appeared at their table, bowing and smiling.

"*Ala wah*, Sah-jin," Soon Yet beamed. "You bring friend tonight? He also is Blue Coat Man, yiss?"

"Detective Faraday, my Number One assistant," O'Hara introduced. "He says he doesn't like Chinese cooking. It's up to you to change his mind, Soon Yet."

The slant-eyed proprietor chuckled. "Can do, Sah-jin. Tonight is very fine duck, fix Canton style. If your friend not say '*Hao!*' when he finish eating, I give my cook a Number One beating with split bamboo."

"Okay," O'Hara said. "We'll start with *ong dong*. Then *sub kum* and *yet-ca mein* with the duck. Heavy on the soya sauce, Soon Yet. Two pots of *lung ching*. Any of that *maygolo* left?"

"For you, Sah-jin—yiss!" Soon Yet replied.

Faraday grinned. "This is all Greek to me, Sarge. It sounds like you've been taking lessons from the Hungry Mandarin."

O'Hara glanced toward the empty booth reserved for the Mandarin. "Yuan Tah's a little late tonight, isn't he?" he remarked to Soon Yet.

"He will arrive, Sah-jin," the proprietor declared confidently. "And he will be much please tonight, for I have prepare a special feast dish for him—a Number One turtle."

Beaming with pride, Soon Yet extended his hands to indicate the size of the turtle. "I cook this *ch'en* slow in his shell, so his flesh will be soft and tender. I heap him high with bamboo sprouts and bean shoots and young water chestnuts, and I serve him with special sauce made of plum wine. *Hola!* It make my mouth water

just to speak of it.”

Faraday shook his head. “You mean to say that Yuan Tah will eat a turtle that size all by himself?”

“*Hai!*” Soon Yet grinned. “Yuan Tah is a person of superior appetite. Had I a dozen such patrons, my fortune would soon be made.”

Soon Yet waddled off with their order, his triple chins swaying, his padded slippers thudding heavily against the floor, so that boards which were silent under all other feet squeaked and crackled in protest.

“Your friend Soon Yet is a pretty hefty specimen himself,” Faraday remarked. “If Yuan Tah is any fatter than that, he must be something for a sideshow.”

“You’ll see for yourself,” O’Hara said. “I imagine he must outscale Soon Yet by a good fifteen or twenty pounds.” He glanced around at the other tables. “It’s not as crowded in here tonight as usual.”

“No wonder,” Faraday replied, nodding toward the streaming windows. “Listen to that rain beating down now. If that keeps up, I guess we won’t get a look at the Mandarin tonight.”

“He hasn’t missed a night so far, rain or not,” O’Hara replied, and turned his head as the front door opened. “Speak of the devil, Faraday—here’s Yuan Tah coming in now.”

Faraday glanced at the bulbous Oriental framed in the gilded doorway and whistled quietly through his teeth. “Good Lord! You were right, Sarge—he *is* fatter than Soon Yet! A regular Moby Dick, in a Chinese edition.”

Soon Yet came rushing forward to greet his Number One guest, bowing and smiling and uttering flowery phrases of welcome as he relieved Yuan Tah of a dripping umbrella. Then he turned and ushered the silent Mandarin to his reserved

booth, hissing a fierce “Make way! Make way!” to the scurrying waiters.

In stately silence Yuan Tah moved through the crowded room, bobbing along like a monstrous round cork, his majestic girth covered by a dark blue quilted *shaam*. Looking neither to left nor right, he kept his hands tucked inside his sleeves, his moonface adorned with a pair of heavily rimmed glasses seemingly held in place by the protruding pouches of his fat cheeks.

With great formality Soon Yet seated Yuan in the booth, then beckoned sharply to the hovering waiter, who immediately placed a four-panel dragon-screen around the table.

Faraday noticed the peculiarly intent look with which Sergeant O’Hara followed each detail of this ceremony. “Still working on your hunch, Sarge?” he asked.

O’Hara gave him an abstracted glance. “There’s something about that Chink—Every time I set eyes on him I get the same queer feeling of something wrong about him, something that doesn’t add up. What’s your impression, Faraday?”

The detective shrugged. “He looks all right to me, Sarge. Just a big fat, Chink, that’s all.”

Their waiter arrived with a laden tray. Faraday stared doubtfully at the unfamiliar concoctions under the steaming lids, but upon O’Hara’s urging filled his plate and began to eat.

“How do you like it?” O’Hara asked.

“Not bad,” Faraday admitted. “This duck is a tasty dish, but I’ll be doggoned if I ever thought I’d be eating stewed acorns.”

“Those are Chinese water-chestnuts,” O’Hara said. “And this sauce that Soon Yet uses is from a recipe supposed to be five thousand years old.”

As they ate, they watched the serving of Yuan Tah's dinner—a seemingly endless parade of covered dishes vanishing behind the dragon screen. Lastly came an enormous platter, doubtlessly bearing the prized turtle, after which the slant-eyed waiter stationed himself at a respectful distance from the screen, forbidden to intrude upon the lordly Yuan Tah's gastronomic exercises unless summoned by a handclap.

"Fat as he is, I don't see how he packs away all that food," Faraday remarked.

"He doesn't," O'Hara replied. "I've talked to the waiter who serves him. Yuan eats plenty, but a lot of the food goes back to the kitchen. These stories about his enormous appetite are a little bit exaggerated."

"But he pays for all the food, even if he doesn't eat it," Faraday pointed out. "He must be pretty well fixed to support a fancy appetite like that."

"I guess he is," O'Hara agreed. "Playing fan-tan with Mark Sin is an expensive hobby, too."

Having finished the main portion of their own dinner, their waiter cleared the table and brought them green glazed pots of *lung ching* tea and a bowl of leeches nuts.

Waiting for the scalding hot tea to cool, they cracked the brittle shells of the spicy brown leeches, glancing idly around at the other tables, where Soon Yet's slant-eyed patrons were eating and chattering about the latest war bulletins and laughing silkily over sly Oriental jokes. In a booth directly across the room two gray-bearded merchants sat over a game of *Ching gong*, as motionless and grave as a pair of wrinkled Buddhas.

Then Soon Yet returned to their table with a round clay flagon from which he poured two careful measures of a pungently fragrant liquor into thin

porcelain cups.

"This is maygolo—aniseed brandy," O'Hara explained. "The real, imported article, from Shensi in North China. Soon Yet has only a few bottles left."

Faraday sipped a little of the aromatic liquor, nodded his head, and leaned back comfortably, helping himself to salted melon seeds. "I wonder how the Mandarin's making out with his turtle?"

"Want to stick around and watch him make his exit?" O'Hara asked.

"Sure," Faraday agreed. "It's a good show—like something you'd read in a book."

Then the Little Shanghai's door opened again, letting in the sound of slashing rain. Six Chinamen entered hastily, shaking water from their round black hats, and there was a sudden stir and buzz of excited whispers on all sides.

Soon Yet bustled forward in what was obviously pleased excitement, leading this newly arrived party to the table of honor in the center of the room. O'Hara and Faraday stared with interest, too, for five of the yellow men wore the massive jade rings that marked them as tong chieftains.

"A gathering of the tong *tu-chuns*," Faraday whispered. "But who's the sixth man—that gray-haired Chink?"

"He's a stranger to me," O'Hara declared. "But he must be pretty important, to be hobnobbing with our tong chiefs. I don't believe I ever saw all five of them gathered in public before."

Moy Kee, chieftain of the Tsin Tiens, Chinatown's most powerful tong, acted as spokesman for the party, bidding Soon Yet supply them with the finest dinner his kitchens could produce.

"*Wahl Wah!*" Soon Yet replied, backing away with a series of profound kowtows, then rushing off to take personal charge of the service for these high-ranking guests. The Number One dinner

ordered by Moy Kee, however, was destined never to be completed.

The tong chiefs and their gray-haired guest were no more than halfway through the meal when the Little Shanghai's door opened to admit a wiry, thin-faced Oriental wearing a bright yellow *shaam* and a small black skullcap. The newcomer halted just inside the door, and something menacing in his rigid posture and taut silence drew everyone's eye.

But one man at least in the Little Shanghai recognized the narrow-eyed stranger, and knew what his sudden appearance foreboded. The gray-haired Chinaman at the tong chiefs' table sprang to his feet, shouting excitedly as he pointed to the man in the doorway.

The lean-faced Oriental flipped back the sleeve of his yellow *shaam* as his hand came up, taking deliberate aim with a black-barreled pistol, and the frantic yelps of the Little Shanghai's panic-stricken patrons was smothered by the crack of the gun spitting bullets with deadly precision.

The gray-haired Chinaman at the table of honor reeled backward, riddled with bullets, grasped blindly at the open-mouthed and round-eyed Moy Kee for support, then doubled over and pitched headlong to the floor.

**T**URNING swiftly on his heel, the slant-eyed gunman stepped back across the threshold, closed the door quietly behind him, and vanished into the streaming night—all within a matter of seconds, and as neatly, as swiftly, as if the scene had been rehearsed a hundred times.

Shouting and shoving, O'Hara and Faraday fought their way forward through the milling crowd. At first sight of the gun in the silent assassin's hand they had whipped out their own weapons, but the wild surge of panic-stricken yellow men had penned them in, making it impossible

to shoot, even when O'Hara had jumped up on a chair.

Faraday was the first to battle his way through the shrill-voiced pandemonium. He sprang to the door and raced out into the pelting darkness of Mulberry Lane in pursuit of the vanished gunman, while O'Hara elbowed his way through the close-packed circle surrounding the stricken Chinaman.

The yellow man was dying—O'Hara saw that much at a glance. Bleeding from half a dozen wounds, he lay with his head on the crouching Moy Kee's knee, eyes closed, his breathing labored and rattling.

"Who is he?" O'Hara demanded, and Moy Kee stammered excitedly that the name of his dying guest was Chang Kai, a great and much respected tong official from a distant Western city.

"Do you know the man who shot him?" O'Hara asked.

"I never see him before," Moy Kee declared, "but I think his name is Tsang Poh."

As if mention of that name had rallied the last remnants of his waning strength, Chang Kai opened his eyes.

Sergeant O'Hara knelt beside him. "Chang, can you tell us who shot you? Was it Tsang Poh?"

Chang Kai nodded, making a feeble gesture toward the gilded doorway. "Tsang—Poh!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Why?" O'Hara pursued. "Tell us why?"

"Moy Kee—know!" the dying Chang gasped. Then he gave a wracking cough, choked, and sagged back limply into final unconsciousness.

O'Hara looked at Moy Kee, and the tong chief hastened to pour out all the details in his possession. Chang Kai, the dead man, had been traveling about from one Chinatown to another on a relentless manhunt, searching for traces of this



Tsang Poh, a thrice-accursed thief who had been posing as treasurer of the Chinese War Orphans Fund, making large cash collections in half a dozen cities before his swindling imposture had been discovered—

“Did Chang know that this Tsang Poh was hiding in our district?” O’Hara queried.

“I do not think so,” Moy Kee replied. “If Chang Kai had knowledge of such Number One fact, surely he would have spoken of it at our secret meeting today.”

Just then Detective Faraday returned, hatless and dripping wet, from his fruitless pursuit along Mulberry Lane. “He made a clean getaway, Sarge. Not a trace. We’d better phone the Precinct and turn in a general alarm—quick.”

Sergeant O’Hara made a sudden, brusque gesture. “Wait, Faraday! Hold on a minute. I have an idea there’s more to this affair than meets the eye—”

“What do you mean, Sarge?” Faraday queried, puzzled. “Murder’s plain enough, isn’t it?”

“Yes—but why was there a murder?” O’Hara countered. “The dead man, Chang Kai, was hunting for the gunman—Tsang Poh. But apparently Chang had no idea that Tsang Poh was anywhere around here. Why, then, did Tsang Poh come in here and start shooting? Why did the hunted man turn into the hunter—without waiting to be cornered? Why didn’t he just cut and run while he had the chance?”

Faraday shook his head. “That’s a sixty-four-dollar question, Sarge. Who can figure out what a Chinaman will do?”

O’HARA straightened up, his face masklike as his glance traveled from the dead Chang lying on the floor to the gilded doorway through which the slant-eyed gunman had fled, and thence to the rain-pelted windows.

“Did you notice that yellow *shaam* he was wearing, Faraday?” O’Hara asked suddenly. “Tsang Poh came out of the rain, yet there were only a few streaks of water showing on his *shaam*. That proves he wasn’t out in it very long—”

“It’s not where he came from, Sarge—it’s where he’s going that counts,” Faraday said. “If we get the dragnet out quick, maybe we can pick him up before he gets rid of that bright yellow *shaam*. ”

“Maybe we can pick him up without a dragnet,” O’Hara replied in a curiously decisive tone, and beckoning Faraday to follow, he strode down the length of the restaurant, past the long row of booths until he came to the Hungry Mandarin’s secluded nook at the far end. A sweep of his arm knocked the dragon-screen aside—

Yuan Tah, the Hungry Mandarin, was sitting stolidly behind his food-littered table, ivory chopsticks in hand. He glanced up in haughty surprise at this abrupt intrusion, his fat cheeks and heavily rimmed glasses giving his face the look of an angry, slant-eyed owl.

“What means this?” Yuan Tah demanded, speaking in a slow and peculiarly blurred voice.

“I’m Sergeant O’Hara of the Chinatown Squad,” was the brisk reply. “There’s been a murder, and it’s my duty to question all eye-witnesses.”

The Hungry Mandarin leaned back. “My name is Yuan Tah,” he said in his limping voice. “I live Number Fifteen Lantern Court. But I am not a witness, Tamen. While I eat, I hear sound of shooting, but I do not leave my table. I have seen nothing.”

“So you kept on eating, right through a murder!” O’Hara snapped. He put both hands on the table and leaned forward, smiling grimly. “Well, I hope you enjoyed your dinner, because you never eat another

one like it! You're going to jail, Yuan! You're under arrest for the murder of Chang Kai!"

Yuan Tah blinked at him, drawing a hissing breath. "Ta-jen makes joke, yiss?" he stammered.

O'Hara's voice hardened. "You might as well drop your bluff, Yuan. I know your real name. *You are Tsang Poh!*"

"Tsang Poh!" the startled Faraday exclaimed. "Hey, Sarge—you're away off the beam! Tsang Poh was the Chink with the gun—the skinny guy in the yellow *shaam*. Yuan here has a blue *shaam*, and he's fat enough to make three like the other—"

"He's Tsang Poh, just the same," O'Hara declared firmly. "If you don't believe it—watch!"

His open hand swept out and caught Yuan Tah squarely across his fat face—a double slap, to left and right. The blows were not hard ones, but they wrought an amazing change in Yuan Tah's appearance. His owlish glasses tumbled off, and as his head bobbed back he broke into a sudden spasm of strangled coughing that doubled him over.

"Spit it out! Spit it out!" O'Hara commanded, seizing Yuan Tah's head with both hands, trying to force the yellow man to open his jaws.

Red faced and bulging-eyed from the strain, Yuan finally opened his mouth and coughed out two curved pads of oiled silk filled with soft cotton.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Faraday exclaimed. "His cheeks were padded!"

"And that's only part of the padding!" O'Hara growled, catching hold of Yuan Tah's collar and wrenching at it until the *shaam* ripped wide open. And stripped of his cunningly puffed out robe, lined with layer upon layer of quilted padding, the monstrously fat Mandarin stood revealed

as a lean, wiry Oriental in a bright yellow *shaam!*

"Jumping Judas! It *is* Tsang Poh!" Faraday burst out, while O'Hara held fast to the writhing, snarling yellow man.

"*Wang pu tau!*" the slant-eyed masquerader cursed, snatching out his hidden gun. But O'Hara's quick fist crashed against his chin and the yellow man slid to the floor, lost temporarily to all further interest in the proceedings.

"Whew!" Faraday exclaimed. "Things have been happening too fast for me!"

"Well, the story goes like this," O'Hara said. "Tsang Poh knew that the Chinese would be after him like bloodhounds to get back that stolen War Fund money, so he built up his fat mandarin disguise. This trick robe and the cheek pads changed his whole appearance. The robe could be slipped on and off as easy as an overcoat, but the cheek pads must have been mighty uncomfortable. They made him mumble when he talked, and he had to take them out while he ate. That's why he always had a screen set up around his table."

"It fitted right in with the rest of his mandarin act," Faraday said. "He's a damned smart Chink."

"And a very fast thinker," O'Hara added. "He must have been pretty panicky when he looked out there a little while ago and saw Chang Kai sitting at a table. I guess he was afraid to risk walking out past Chang, even in his disguise. So there he was, marooned behind his screen. But it didn't take him long to figure a way out. He knew the waiter wouldn't come in unless he clapped his hands. And there was a window in the booth, opening out into a sideyard—"

"Now I get it!" Faraday declared. "He slipped out of his padded robe and climbed out through the window to do his killing as Tsang Poh."

"That's right," O'Hara said. "The sideyard has a covered alleyway leading to the street. It's raining—the streets are empty. He simply opened the restaurant door, emptied his gun at Chang, jumped back into the alley, and then climbed back into the booth. A neat, slick job of murder, with the dragon-screen making a ready-made alibi for him."

Sergeant O'Hara bent down and picked up something lying on the floor under the table—a round black skullcap.

"Here we are—the last link. Of course, I didn't work all this out like I'm telling it to you now.

"It came to me backwards. But the details all fitted into place the moment I

discovered the key clue—that Yuan Tah wasn't really a fat man."

"You've got a damned sharp pair of eyes, Sarge!" Faraday congratulated.

Sergeant O'Hara grinned. "It wasn't sharp eyes, Faraday—it was my ears that told me Yuan Tah was a phony. Remember that hunch I kept telling you about? Well, Yuan looked like a fat mandarin, all right, but tonight it dawned on me all of a sudden that although he was apparently even heavier than old Soon Yet, when he walked across the floor not a single board ever creaked under his weight!"