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**Y**ONG LO was a reptile with an artist's soul. He did not sting with a fang, but belonged to the family of boas and coiled about his victims till the last drop of life was drained from them.

To him blood was not red. It was yellow and silver and green. Golden disks, soft, heavy and velvety to the touch, were chunks of rich blood, transmuted by the alchemy of Yong's spiked roulette wheel from the purses of his guests to his gambling tables.

Silver coins were so much blood squeezed from gullible victims. Crisp, crackling greenbacks, or those wrinkled and fouled, were certificates of blood, left by those who could not carry gold.

This relentless coiling about his victims till their last chip of cash went across his tables under his rakes was the reptilian streak in Yong Lo. His artistic soul verified itself in the grandeur of his gambling room.

First you entered a low, wobbly store that helped to demoralize Hop Alley. In this filthy cube stale tobacco fought moldy spices for stinking ascendancy. Here two Chinese clerks kept store for Yong Lo, but if you were popular, these would rap on a door in the rear of the shop, wait

for the panel to slide back and a lean yellow face to appear at the slot.

"Man want see Yong Lo. Pass."

The door would open, the chosen would enter.

But instead of leaving hope behind, they would pass buoyantly into the second room, that red and black alcove, Yong Lo's gambling parlor.

Its walls were red, pigeon-blood red, black stripes running alternately from ceiling to floor, where a red and black mottled rug silenced the tread of feet.

From the center swung a monster lamp wrought of black iron, rose-colored incandescence glowing from the glass lights about which the chimera coiled its hideously scrolled malformation.

The gaming tables were covered with pigeon-blood simonis cloth. Their edges were of jet, hard and gleaming, on which the players drummed money-hungry fingers.

And the wheel—that revolving, striped and figured bowl, the ball hobbing over the flutings—the roulette wheel was a marvel.

The numbers on its black rim were rose color, coral set in ebony. The alternate stripings of the red and black bowl were ebony and lacquer,

polished strips accurately joined, tapering to points where they crowded to the hub. Agog on its race, the wheel was a diabolical kalcidoscope.

Yong Lo presided nightly at the gambling classics. Clad in a mandarin robe of pigeon-blood red, trimmed confusedly with black, he sat high up on a sooty throne of fumed wood. With a red lacquer fan he drummed occasionally on the lion's-head arm of his chair.

Immobile, Yong Lo's drum-skin face was a mask for the greed eating his heart. He presided over the games, contributed to the law in his neighborhood, and hoarded the proceeds of his wheel in a secret cache of the chandelier in the sleeping room behind the gambling parlor.

There were three rooms in Yong Lo's apartment: the mock store out front, the red and black gambling chamber, and this third room in back, a hutch filled with junk, bunks, opium stands, rags for carpets, an oil lamp for illumination.

A big chandelier on heavy chains swung from the ceiling of this last room, but Yong Lo never used the fixture for lighting purposes. The gambling miser trusted more the chandelier bowl swinging near his bunk than the security of banks.

In this cubby room Yong Lo slept.

Just now Lee Gow shared the hole with Yong Lo.

Lee Gow had been offered the seclusion of the den for a few days while hiding from the police. Something the authorities had found in Lee Gow's rooms, something belonging to a murdered white girl, made it impossible for Lee Gow to venture abroad.

Bred in Yong Lo's tong, Lee Gow obtained fraternal cover.

In this room, adjacent to the snarling, money-sucking patrons in the gambling den, Lee Gow crouched in his left, a rat, apprehensive of the

very shadows that moved across the walls.

Occasionally he peeked through the keyhole of the door, to watch the awful faces in that red and black gambling room. Then he would crawl back to his bunk, suck on a bamboo tube and be at peace.

TIUS for a week all went well until one night the roulette wheel won too much for Yong Lo. Too much to suit Butch Killian, who noticed that each time Yong Lo tapped the arm of his chair with the red fan, the wheel came to rest at a figure that won stakes for Yong Lo.

Butch Killian had the complexion of a beefsteak and the strength of a tiger.

Once, twice, four times Butch saw Yong's fan tap the chair. Four times the house won.

Butch raised his fists, was about to bellow protest at the croupier, when Yong Lo caught the eye of the infuriated giant. Out of the mongolian's black orbs a terrible warning oozed, a warning that checked the blurt on Butch's curled lips.

Then a wan smile filtered through the quartz of Yong's face.

Butch Killian threw down a hundred on the red.

Three times Yong's fan tapped the chair.

When the wheel stopped Butch Killian picked up nineteen hundred dollars and left.

Far into the night Yong Lo sat in the room behind the den, pondering over the thing Butch Killian had discovered.

While Yong Lo had lived alone here, through nine years of crooked roulette, no one had detected the fraud.

A weary, deeply drawn breath sounded from Lee Gow's bunk. Slowly, as the boa creeps, Yong Lo's brain functioned. He wondered if Lee

Gow. . . . The glib terror of a smile crinkled his tight skin, then slid back to the covering of his skull.

Yong Lo shook the sleeping Lee Gow.

"Lee Gow!"

The sleeper grunted, and his mouth dropped open with the comatose indifference of one drugged.

"Lee Gow! Get up! Yong Lo want you to kill somebody."

Yong Lo shook the torpid fugitive.

Lee Gow's face showed not a whit of understanding.

Beholding the Chinese sleeper, Yong Lo saw the corner of a paper peeping from under a cover in the bunk.

Deftly Yong Lo withdrew this paper. Creeping to his gambling parlor, Yong Lo unfolded and read what Lee Gow had scrawled. An icy smile glazed his face as he finished reading. Once again he read it:

Butch Killian:—

Don't tell cops me hiding here. Me tell truth, Yong Lo put winnings in fake chandelier bowl of bunk room in back. Chandelier on chains, like pulley. Turn crank, chandelier go up, go down. I tell truth, like yesterday about crooked roulette wheel. You write how we get money. Yong Lo he not savvy you me work together. You not tell police, we get Yong Lo cash.

—Lee Gow.

At a secretary in the gambling chamber Yong Lo destroyed Lee Gow's note, and wrote another one:

Butch Killian:—

You be last man leave here tonight. You come back later, ring bell at store door. Me send Yong Lo out to answer bell before he undress from red black mandarin robe. When Yong Lo open door, you choke him, kill, throw him down manhole of sewer on corner. Me wait in hall you come back from manhole. Me open door for you, you follow me, we get cash, divvy, skin out.

Money in chandelier back of gambling room. Seventy thousand. —Lee Gow.

Folding the message he had just written, Yong Lo slipped back into

the darker bunk room and replaced the folded paper under Lee Gow's bunk cover.

All next day Yong Lo hovered near Lee Gow, preventing the fugitive double-crosser from reading the message he now carried concealed on his person.

That night, just after Butch Killian's bullying voice boomed in the gambling room, Yong, through curtained glances, saw Lee Gow, under cover of peeking, dexterously push a wad of paper into the keyhole of the door.

Yong Lo recalled how each night Lee Gow hung about the door, and now he understood.

Passing through to the gambling room that night, to take his place on the big chair, Yong noticed the paper had been removed from the keyhole.

Yong Lo let Butch Killian win five heavy stakes. Then Yong got back every dollar, and took every cent the human tiger put on the table, until a bit before closing time Butch Killian had placed nine thousand dollars on the red simonis cloth, and had seen the black croupier rake them in at each gentle, decreeing tap of Yong's fan.

Yong saw the rage cooking in Killian's body.

The maddened man clenched his fists deep in his empty pockets, and the fire in Killian's wild eyes faded, as he stood there a beefy mass. Yong saw the man draw a crumpled paper from his pocket. He saw Butch Killian read the note again; saw Butch Killian sneer cruelly. Then Killian left and the house closed.

**L**EE GOW and Yong Lo were jabbering in the bunk room, when the store annunciator suddenly snared on the wall.

Lee Gow's eyes widened. Yong Lo took the tiny scissors from his nostrils where he was trimming black hairs.

and looked perplexed. Then he assumed the expression of one startled.

"Lee Gow! Me got tip tonight. Didn't believe first, but guess tip was true. Cops coming to search here, for you."

"Yong! No cops—not let cops in, eh?"

"Must let in, Gow—they smash in, chop in."

"Na—na—na—they find me. I kill white girl—I hide in cellar hole."

Lee Gow was on his knees, the iron ring of the cellar hatch in his spidery fingers.

The bell snared again: one long buzz, then several short impatient whirrs.

Lee Gow tried to open the bolt on the cellar door.

"Yong—help, me hide in cellar. You let cops in, not let them look in cellar!"

"Bah—they look in cellar. Here! Yong Lo have good scheme."

Yong already had his robe off.

"You wear my red black mandarin robe. I wear your clothes. You go to front door, let in cops. I stay here. They pinch me. Think me you in your clothes. Find out at station that me Yong Lo. I not kill nobody, police let me go. You skip while me at station. Thousand cash here in pocket of mandarin robe."

Yong helped Lee Gow into his garments.

The annunciator snared again.

The lamp in the bunk room was extinguished, and while Lee Gow, disguised as Yong, slipped toward the front door, Yong donned another red robe.

In the dark bunk room Yong manipulated something that clinked against the heavy chandelier chains. The iron ring of the cellar door in the floor squeaked on its rusty staple, then Yong Lo, in the rôle of Lee Gow, slipped forward to the store and pulled back the entrance door.

A MAN was crossing the street, coming from the manhole on the corner: a huge man tilting his bulk on tiptoe, much like a hog walking on its hind legs.

The big man came to Yong Lo's door.

"Lee Gow!" Butch Killian growled into the black door opening.

"Sh!" whispered Yong from the darkness.

"Lee Gow. I killed Yong, the cheater—choked him in that red gambling shirt, like you wrote me to. Pushed him down the sewer manhole."

"Hee-hee."

Yong's guarded glee was all Butch Killian heard as he followed the slippered mongolian to the bunk room in back.

"Make a light, Lee Gow. Where's the dead chink's money?"

"Give me your hands." Yong whispered covertly.

Yong's bony fingers took Killian's thick hands and led him in the dark.

"Old Yong never piped a word after I got my grippers on his wrinkled turtle neck."

"Hee-hee." Yong Lo bleated in the dark.

Now they were in the bunk room.

Yong Lo raised Butch's hands upward till the big bully touched a heavy chain.

The Chinaman whispered low.

"You strong, like lion. You pull down chandelier chain. Me light lamp. You pull down money bowl. We divvy cash."

Butch Killian pulled on the chain but the fixture did not lower. Then the big brute grabbed the chain with both hands.

As he did so, smooth rings were slipped over his wrists, were compressed on the thick flesh, snapped. "Butch, big strong feller, pull chandelier down."

“Say, Lee Gow—what the—”

But in that instant his ankles were meshed in something, the tether of which was fast to the floor.

With Killian tugging in the dark, endeavoring to free his legs, the Chinaman slip-slipped to a corner of the room.

A tip of flame dawned in the cup of two bony hands, the match touched the lamp.

When the light seeped through the room, Butch Killian, his arms aloft, handcuffed to the heavy chandelier chain, his feet bound in several windings of folded bed sheeting secured in the iron ring of the cellar door, looked into the placid face of Yong Lo dressed in a red silk mandarin robe.

Butch Killian tore with his great strength at the cuffs securing his wrists, but the steel snarled back at him. He tried to kick free of the sheeting about his ankles, but the ten or twelve-ply bandage of linen was stronger, stronger even than Butch's hydra strength.

Yong Lo stood off a little way and laughed.

“Butch Killian big boob. You let Lee Gow make rummy of you. Lee Gow hide here from cops. He kill white girl. Lee Gow double-cross Yong Lo. Tell you Yong's wheel work crooked. Lee Gow then write you to get my cash. I wrote note, not Lee Gow. I tell you to ring bell and kill Yong Lo when he come to front door. Hie! I send Lee Gow in my clothes. Him think you cops. You think him me. You kill Lee Gow, not me. Lee Gow dead in sewer for killing white girl. You die for killing Lee Gow. You big strong boob. Only Yong Lo get free. Hie!”

At a wall where chains came through the paneling, Yong Lo turned a windlass and Butch Killian was hoisted with the chandelier as it raised on chains, passing through holes in the ceiling.

“Money heavy tonight in chandelier, Butch.”

Wrists in the steel cuffs, Butch's arms were drawn taut above his head. Marshaling the strength of four men, he tried to withhold the chains from pulling him upward, but the windlass was a squeaky music box in Yong's hands.

The chains tightened, creaked, till they had lifted Butch's two hundred and forty pounds three inches clear of the floor.

The windlass complained at Butch's added weight, and Yong threw the pawl in the crank ratchet and left the cursing man swinging by his wrists, dangling from the ceiling like a heifer about to be skinned.

“Butch not holler now, else Yong call cops and tell how Butch kill Lee Gow and throw in sewer.”

From a bunk Yong Lo brought another sheet.

He wound it about Butch's body, across the stomach. He tied the knot at the back of the suspended man. Through the loop of the sheet Yong Lo thrust a curtain pole, devising an enormous tourniquet about Butch Killian's middle.

Yong Lo belonged to the family of boas that coil and throttle.

He gave the curtain pole a half-turn, taking up the slack in the sash about Butch's torso.

The big man was silent, fumbling with his wits for a way out. He swayed, jerked, cavorted on his fastenings, but the handcuffs held him aloft. The metal gnawed at his wrists till something warm trickled down his cold arms.

He grew weak. Sweat dripped from him, and the shriveled yellow man below him, a spider plying at a huge fly, gave the wooden pole another turn.

The flesh folded beneath Butch's clothing.

He tried to curse, to shout, but rage and exhaustion stifled the effort. The

pole turned another half-circle; the sheet sank in, cramped; a pain floated around Butch's stomach.

The tourniquet was getting stubborn, and the Chinaman now had to tug with all his might to budge the pole farther.

Butch's neck turned black. His eyes grew bigger. Rushing noises swooped down upon him. And still his brute strength fought the death Yong Lo was inflicting.

"Big boob, Butch Killian is."

Yong Lo now had to hang on the pole to move it. The sheet tightened. Something ripped inside of Butch. Crazed, the door of hell just over the pole winding an inch farther, pain racking his vitals, being ground to death in the middle by Yong Lo's infernal pole, Butch Killian tugged on the handcuffs with all his weight and strength.

He drew steadily. In a tug of war with death he pulled on those handcuffs. Continually, harder, horribly, every ounce of effort went into that pull to burst or bend the cuffs about his wrists.

Fiercer, terribly, he drew and drew with those mighty arms, till his temples thrummed, the handcuffs seared, champed through flesh, bit on the bone.

Still Butch drew down with that mighty, tigerish strength; the sheet tightened a bit; his thighs seemed to take what belonged in his torso.

Red and black spots before his eyes. Butch strained on his distended arms. drew—something stoked—something

blazed at his wrist—another sickening slock of his arm, like the sound of a fowl being drawn.

A groan from Butch as Yong Lo drew down the pole another inch, flooding Killian's vitals with a hot mass from something that seeped within him.

Then Butch's arm came down upon the Chinaman's head. The blow sent the heathen down, forced him to let go of the pole, which unwound like a pinwheel.

Knocked from his balance, Yong Lo's head bumped Butch's thighs, and the big man opened his legs and caught Yong's neck between them. Still suspended, Killian's thighs closed on the Chinaman's throat, held him breathless in that sinewy vise.

Two minutes, three minutes, four minutes he held Yong Lo, then Butch's senses left.

**W**HEN they found them next morning, Yong Lo was dead on the floor. A ruby patty of coagulation plastered the Chinaman's black hair, blood that had dripped from Butch Killian; for Butch, when his arm hit Yong Lo's head, had pulled with his beast's strength so mightily on the chain that his wrist gave way, separated where the steel cuff chewed.

His dismembered, clenched fist remained aloft in the locked handcuff, next to his other arm by which he swung, bleeding to death from the handless right arm dangling over Yong Lo's strangled body.

