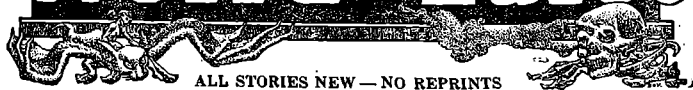


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1943

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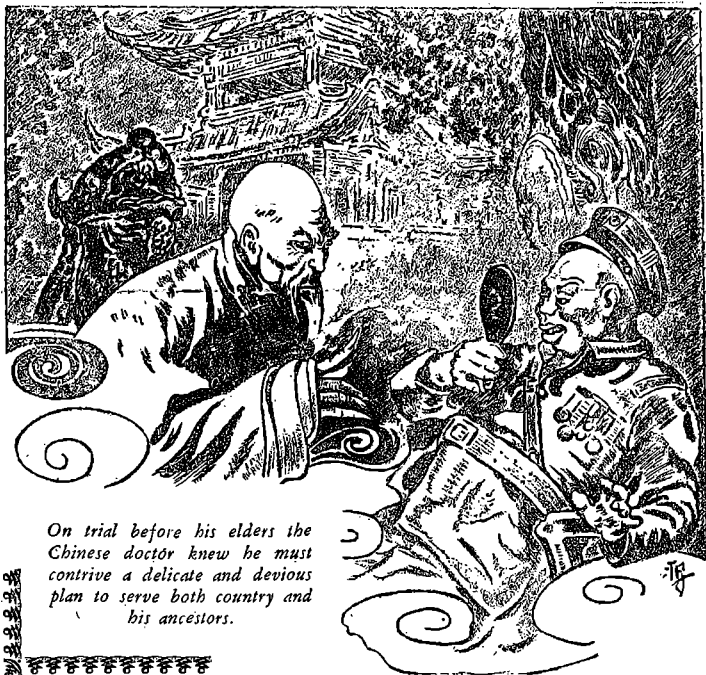
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The Street of Faces



On trial before his elders the Chinese doctor knew he must contrive a delicate and devious plan to serve both country and his ancestors.

By **FRANK OWEN**

AS General Yoshida walked through the Street of Faces where the masks were made, the children fled from him in terror for he had no face, merely hideous scars and frightful purple blue welts. His eyes, however, were still able to function. Miraculously they had been spared by the bits of shrapnel that had sprayed his face. For weeks he had

lain in a hospital, so long that many of the officers of his command believed he was dead, and those that visited him had grave doubts. General Yoshida he might be, but they could not be sure, for his face was unrecognizable and his voice was thick as he tried to speak. They could hardly understand him. To them it seemed hardly credible that their merciless general should

be reduced to such a pitiful wreck. He had always been cruel to his enemies, he never took prisoners, slaying them all in order to save rice. Many, he permitted his men to bayonet. It was good practice for them, it gave them certain pleasure, and more important still, it saved ammunition. And now General Yoshida lay without a face, or at least a face that was recognizable. But his heart was strong and as he had lain there he had been busy plotting. In all China no man was a greater strategist, not even that recent premier who had won many a point by feigning illness and going to bed for a few days when his presence was vitally needed at a conference. Even without a face, Yoshida's black, shrewd heart was alert and plotting.

Entering the Street of Faces, General Yoshida went at once to the shop of Doctor Fang Kan, the only shopkeeper on the street who was a mechanic in human flesh. His brother, Fang Kee's shop next door was a kaleidoscope of color, not only did he create masks and puppets but also dragons for the Dragon Festival. Few cities in China had not had one of his magnificent dragons moving along its gay-decked streets.

Doctor Fang Kan had just partaken of a hearty meal and he was resting. Only the rich came to him and now in all of China no man was rich. But he was not perturbed.

The affairs of the country were his affairs. He believed with Confucius, that "to lead an uninstructed people to war is to throw them away." When called upon, he had given freely of his medical skill to reconstruct the wrecked features of soldiers. And he had done more. Though his manner was gentle, he walked by night and many was the Japanese who had the ill-fortune to encounter him on a lonely road. There was steel in his arm, and his strength was like unto that of five men. However, few knew of his great strength

and so he encountered little opposition as he translated the Japanese.

General Yoshida, though he lacked a face, was buoyed up by arrogance. Despite the fact that he was frightfully disfigured, he was still a general. He had even walked in the presence of his glorious Emperor. When the festivities were over, the Golden Emperor had been locked up once more in his palace until it should be time to parade him again on a similar occasion.

DOCTOR FANG KAN'S eldest son had been killed when the Japanese invaded the Philippines. Fang Kan had stood before the gods in his temple and taken a vow that ten Japs should die for every season his son had lived. Nor did he spend time in grieving. There was a mighty work to do. Time for grief would come afterward. China had been invaded. The Spectre of War had left many deep and agonizing wounds. Hunger was riding rampant. Disease was held somehow in check. Each night Fang Kan walked, and Japs were dying. Other men walked by night. The farmer who plowed his field by day, at night turned into a stalwart warrior. Even cooks left their employer's home when the evening meal had been cleared away. Little wonder therefore that the soldiers believed the late evening air of China was unhealthy for the Nipponese. They longed for their homes in Tokio, Osaka and Yokahama which so few of them would ever see again.

General Yoshida was angered that Doctor Fang Kan did not get up to meet him as he entered the shop, but he did not show his true feelings, for arrogance is a sorry flag to be waved by a man who has no face. Hanging on the wall were a few written pictures, while here and there were displayed masks from his brother's factory. One might have been Hirohito, but the general did not notice, so an explosion was avoided.

"I am General Yoshida," said the little man curtly.

"You wish me to make you a new face?" asked the doctor gently. His manner was too abrupt to please Yoshida but after all one glance at him was sufficient to suggest his mission.

"If you are Doctor Fang Kan."

"You have come to the right place. What kind of a face would you like to have? Evil I suppose."

"Do you want your shop destroyed?" cried the general.

"In that case," was the tranquil reply, "what a pity it will be that you will have to pursue conquests with a destroyed face."

"There are other doctors."

"Plenty, famed for acupuncture, and the intricacies of the pulse; to dispel a fever, or to prepare tonics but, alas, in the entire province I alone meddle with faces. When a great man loses 'face' he comes to me. I can remove blemishes of every kind but not the eternal blemish of oppression. At the time of the Chin Dynasty, at about the time the Great Wall was completed, one of my ancestors of revered memory was known as 'The Doctor of Lip Repair.' It was one of the earliest recorded operations in the medium which our American comrades in arms speak of as 'Plastic Surgery.' Even then, vanity was rampant and my illustrious ancestor amassed a considerable fortune. His healing art, he taught to his son, who taught it to his eldest son and so on down through the centuries. And every son was named Fang Kan. I am fortunate to have been the recipient of this elegant heritage. Frequently we have had doctors in China whose sole claim to knowledge has been that they could wield a pen, for no special medical training was necessary for them to go about among the sick. It is because of them that we have such sayings as: 'To take no medicine is the best cure' and 'Medicine does not kill, the physician kills.' However, in the days of the

Chou and Chin Dynasties medicine attained a high degree of development and doctors were superior men. So also have been the long line of 'Lip Repairers' who are known as Fang Kan."

"Very interesting!" spat out Yoshida, "but of what interest is that to me?"

"Certainly, to you of all people, my qualifications as a physician should be of prime importance. However, I should add, that the good surgeon first cures the ills of the nation, then human ailments."

"You mean China must be healed of her wounds before you will help me?" There was little bombast in the general's tone now.

"It's an interesting kernel to chew on, but I will not hold you to it even though the urge to do so is great. But that, too, will come when the dragons that guard our earth and sleep under our mountains grow weary of this war and spew out all invaders wherever they lie festering."

Doctor Fang Kan was in an amiable mood. He closed his eyes so that no single glitter of his thoughts might shine through them. Yes, it would indeed be a great moment for him when Yoshida lay at the mercy of his knife. If the knife took matters into its own hands and snuffed out a despicable, arrogant life, the air of China would have a whiff of garden freshness. Fang Kan's garden was small but he seldom slept without walking in it for awhile before retiring. That night the chrysanthemums would report to him that all was well.

GENERAL YOSHIDA had the sudden fear that the operation might never be performed, that at the last moment Fang Kan might decline the honor that was offered to him.

However, his fears were allayed when the doctor began speaking once more. "There was an occasion when a man came to me who had the appearance of a wolf.

This was decidedly awkward in his business for he was a pirate, a brigand, captain of a junk that went about in the China Seas, exacting toll from all those too weak to resist. Frequently, while vacationing on shore, he concocted various nefarious schemes that were not very successful because the intended victim always looked at his face and saw the shadow of a wolf in his expression. So he came to me. He wanted to be made over, so that his expression might be that of a philosopher. I acceded to his wishes. I gave him a handsome, gentle, benign expression. Nevertheless the shade of the wolf still peeped out from his eyes. I was satisfied, however, for I am a Doctor of Lip Repair. I cannot operate on the eyes."

"Very interesting," said Yoshida meekly. To try to frighten the doctor with an overbearing manner was as hard as getting a mountain to follow one down the road. However, there was still hope that the doctor might indirectly help him with his carefully worked out plans. After all he was not a brigand, nor did his appearance suggest that of a wolf. A parallel was lacking in the story. He was a noble member of the Bushido though without some semblance of a face it would be hard to convince anyone of his high position. Never once did it enter his smug little mind that he was placing himself at the entire mercy of Doctor Fang Kan's knives, nor that frequently, in the annals of the world, sharp knives had cut history into interesting and more serviceable patterns.

"I will start molding a new face for you tomorrow morning," said Fang Kan, "be here with the first streaks of dawn. If you are late, I shall refuse the job."

That night the doctor spent long hours in his garden. It was refreshing to hear the wind chattering in the tall bamboo. When daylight cleft the sky with streaks of light, like new-drawn swords, his knives would be at work on the loathesome

Yoshida. It was a pleasant task to contemplate. But who would guarantee that it would be successful? And yet, unaccountably, fear cluttered his heart. He was weary beyond all understanding. He sat down on a marble bench. Oddly he had the feeling that there was someone at his back. Perhaps it was Yoshida anticipating his own actions, with a knife equally as sharp as any the doctor might use in his operations. He shook his head, and closed his eyes. Angered he was at the thought that thought of death should terrify him. In these hours of torture for China, with women and children being blown to pieces by bombs and aged, wounded people, with blind eyes groping along furrows that once were roads, death was more precious than life and a deal kinder. Let Yoshida strike, it would not matter. He was not afraid of the future. He was without debt and had taken good care of the ancestral tablets. But still the feeling of horror persisted. With considerable effort, he turned his head and looked in back of him. No one was there and yet a short distance away, a long line of figures in dark robes were entering the garden. Silently, like slim ghosts they came. What matter that there was no gateway within the shadows from which they emerged? In regular order they took their places in front of him, like unto an audience before the dais of a story teller. Some looked very old, none looked young. And all had a vague something about them, a kinship with him that he could not explain.

Then understanding came to him, these were his ancestors, these were all the long line of doctors of which he was the living symbol. All of them were or had once been doctors named Fang Kan.

Cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. His eyes felt like ice in their sockets. His very marrow had frozen and his blood had ceased to flow. This was ignominy indeed. He was on trial before his elders.

Not one of these doctors had ever lost a patient, had ever been guilty of treachery. And he was planning the destruction of Yoshida while pretending to rebuild his face. It mattered not to his ancestors how many Japanese he killed for China but they must not be his patients when their lives were snuffed out. These were the men who had glorified surgery. Through the ages they had built up a family reputation that was written in living ink in the Annals of China. It must not crumble because one of their number had failed in his duty.

Deer was dropping from the tall trees, and there was chill in the air. The music of the bamboos was a dirge. No longer was there perfume in that garden, and the night sounds were stilled. The doctor's eyes were unaccountably keen. Why should all his ancestral doctors appear before him to balk the decomposition of General Yoshida? Was not a dead enemy, a friend?

Outside the wall, a Drunken Dragon, that is a poet, was walking somewhat unsteadily homeward, and in direct violation of the edicts of the Japanese Army, he was filling the air with song:

"Sing to your heart's content, for gods and ghosts there be.

How do I know I shall not die of hunger and fill the gutter?"

THE sound of the booming voice broke the spell, the night sounds stirred into life. Doctor Fang Kan gazed about him in bewilderment. Gone were the ghosts of his ancestors. But the memory of them filled his thoughts, nor did he forget their message. Though they had not spoken, their presence was enough. He knew, as surely as though their wishes had been written in flaming characters on the sky. But still the desire to dispose of General Yoshida once and forever had grown to be a craving he could not assuage.

The light of morning was burnishing

the eastern sky. He bathed his face in the water of a spring. It cooled his forehead, and washed away the ice beads of perspiration. There was work for him to do. As he walked into his shop, Yoshida was waiting for him.

Doctor Fang Kan's greeting was perfunctory. He motioned the general to follow him to the small, garden-facing room that he used as his surgery, though he preferred to call it the studio wherein he modeled faces. Yoshida was somewhat arrogant, showing not the slightest trace of fear. Apparently, he was unable to grasp the absurdity of it, a Chinese enemy doctor brandishing knives about his head and no one to witness whatever might happen. It was a moment for Yoshida to offer prayers to the gods of Shinto, but he was too busy plotting the future to worry about anything else.

And Fang Kan went to work. Dexterously he handled the knives, that lay in a friendly row on a table before him. The last knife in the line was long and thin and deadly. It might spell finis for the arrogant general. Or perhaps it would not speak at all. Fang Kan gathered sufficient skin from the chest and thighs of Yoshida to fashion a face and if he took off a trifle more skin than was needed, set it down as merely a guarantee against emergencies. Yoshida felt little pain for the doctor used an ancient local anaesthetic that was as soothing as a fragrant balm. As the surgery progressed, Doctor Fang Kan became so absorbed in his work, he forgot all else. No longer was he an enemy of this little faceless man, but a doctor performing an age-old miracle that had been handed down from father to son since the Tang Dynasty. For hours he worked without cessation, as the day swallowed the sun. When the last beams of light had died, his task was done. Bandages had been applied to the sculptured likeness of a Chinese face.

At Fang Kan's command, servants car-

ried Yoshida gently to a pleasant room opening upon the garden, where he could rest, sleep, recover and forget for awhile that he was a despicable general, hated by all those who watched over him so carefully, fed him and saw to it that he was as comfortable as possible.

Meanwhile the doctor put on his ancestral robes, and repaired to a room where he could drink tea in quietude. Through the open window perfume drifted. Another night was upon him but, now there was no longer fear. He had been true to ancestors, true to his surgical tradition and somehow he knew that all would work out satisfactorily for China. From the ancients, wisdom had come to him. The dead, wrapped in silence, had yet been able to convey their thoughts to him. Not for a moment did he believe he had been dreaming. That the ancestral doctors had come to him, he had no doubt, for it seemed no more absurd to him than the acknowledged fact that at the age of fifty a fox can take the form of a woman, and frequently does.

DURING the next few weeks, Yoshida had no reason to complain about the service that was given him. He was fed well and the bed was comfortable. The pillow, however, was too soft. He would have preferred one made of wood or porcelain as in his own land. Then, too, he was not used to sleeping on a bed. And for awhile he was worried about the little fireplace under it for heating in the winter months. Suppose some Chinese patriot should build a fire with heat enough to roast him to death. There was reason enough for worry, but of the doctor he was not afraid. He longed to rise from the bed and sleep on rugs spread upon the floor but he refrained. That might be interpreted as a mark of cowardice. So he endured the torture of a soft bed with pillows.

The morning came at last when the bandages could be removed. Trying to suppress his excitement, Yoshida looked into the mirror which the doctor obligingly held for him. The face that gazed out at him was that of a young Chinese with a friendly smile. Doctor Fang Kan had added the suggestion of a smile in a spirit of mockery. He knew that his people were always wary of a man who had a smiling face even though they were the most laughing people in the whole world. Now, however, with China so grievously wounded there was no reason to laugh. Yet Yoshida smiled and was satisfied.

"How can I ever repay you?" he said jubilantly. Now he could be a menace to China without personal danger. He could kill at will, nor would he be suspected.

"You are satisfied then?" said the doctor softly.

"Abundantly."

"I am gratified. I was afraid you might be disappointed."

"What do you mean? I don't understand. Is not my face pale and round as the full moon?"

"True, but it is the wolf story all over again. I wish I could have done something for your eyes."

"You mean my eyes are those of a wolf?" asked the general angrily.

"No, of a Japanese. In other words rapacious, crafty, drunk with power."

Yoshida made little attempt to hide his anger. "For your insults," he screamed, "I will cause your entire family to be wiped out, even your cousins and your father-in-law."

"We of China have grown used to death," was the gentle reply. "It is never further away than our fingertips. We fear it not, but you, preposterous General, will be in a difficult position. Unless you come to me every month, so that I may apply a special unguent to your face, it will wither and grow black, more frightful than

the smashed face with which you came to me. And people will shun you as though you had a plague. You will be friendless and alone and forced to live in a desert place."

Yoshida's attitude changed at once. "You are safe from me," he said, "and your offense will be overlooked."

"I wish I could grant you the same immunity, but I cannot. With a smiling face or not, you are vile. Nevertheless, I am your doctor and I wish my handiwork to be a success. I have never had the misfortune to fail in my surgical work. But now the time has come for you to pay for my services."

"Name whatever price you wish."
"My fee will not be large, merely any papers you may have in your pockets."

"I cannot accede to your wishes. My papers are of a secret nature. They must not be read by anyone."

"I do not wish to read them. If you wish we'll burn them right here."

As though the entire scene had been rehearsed, a servant brought a lighted candle.

"Give me the papers," the doctor directed.

RELUCTANTLY, Yoshida handed them over. At once the doctor applied them to the flame. They burned with considerable enthusiasm. When naught but ashes remained, Fang Kan collected them carefully, as though they were so much gold. "This is my fee and I am satisfied."

"I don't understand; they're only ashes."

"Put it down that I am eccentric, if you wish; or perhaps I do not care to risk carrying a large sum of money in my humble shop as long as so many of your soldiers are in the city. To accept gold, would place my life in jeopardy; by accepting ashes, I leave jeopardy to you."

"I was always bad at riddles."

"In time, this one will be solved for you. And now you may go, you are well

enough to travel. One month from today return to my shop if that is possible."

"You can depend on it, I'll be back. I intend to take good care of my new face. If I can help it, it shall not wither."

So General Yoshida swaggered from the shop and along the Street of Faces. Children smiled at him in friendly manner as he passed. His body was all vice, but his face reflected virtue and children were no longer afraid of him. Now he could go wherever he wanted with immunity. He knew enough Chinese for the passing brief words he might be forced to utter.

Through Great Street he strode, glancing with simulated interest at the beautiful, vertical signs as though he was able to understand them. He was affronted by the fact that most of the men that passed him were taller than he was; nor did he notice that many of the elder shopkeepers, loitering in their doorways, looked askance at a Chinese wearing a Japanese uniform. Traitors were few in China and they found his presence among them an unpleasant novelty. However, there were many dark nights and eventually his time would come to hang up his hat.

General Yoshida decided that he would spend a few days with his troops, dispose of the despatches and letters that had accumulated in his absence. He would place Oshima in charge and then set out on his travels. Perhaps his fellow officers would like to give a large banquet at the hotel on the lake which they had taken over to use as headquarters. Perhaps when the Emperor heard of his exploits he would be given a high position with the war board in Tokio.

As he reached the outskirts of his own encampment, he was accosted by a Japanese sentry with a fixed bayonet. When he was about to speak, to explain his Chinese face, the sentry prodded him and the sharp bayonet bit into his flesh. Other soldiers came running up. They jabbered and gesticu-

lated excitedly. He wanted to tell them that he was Yoshida, supreme commander of all the troops, but they wouldn't let him speak. If he uttered a sound, he was stabbed viciously. They were dunderheads. It was inglorious misunderstanding. A member of the Bushido to be exposed to such indignities. He remembered that he himself had instigated this form of bayonet practice. He had proclaimed that the steel tongue of a bayonet was very persuasive. Now it was being used on his noble person, but the culprits would pay. He'd see they were thrown into the lake, carrying full pack, and no one would be permitted to rescue them. If they succeeded in fighting their way ashore, they'd be thrown in again until they ceased to struggle.

GENERAL YOSHIDA'S hopes revived as he saw Oshima approaching. Colonel Oshima was a man of culture and refinement. He had been educated in China but had absorbed little of Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless he was of a kind nature. He hated to harm anyone except his enemies. With them he was a past master of Gestapo methods. Not even Germany's Himmler could excel him in wanton cruelties. He hunted down all those who were opposed to the Bushido as relentlessly as a hunter stalks his prey. But as an officer, General Yoshida could find no fault with him. He was a bright exponent of

military discipline. Surely Oshima would release him from this stupid and painful position in which he had inadvertently placed himself.

However, as Oshima came toward him, Yoshida's hopes perished. There was blood in his eyes, the lust for killing. He had killed more prisoners than any other officer on Chinese soil. Most of his associates permitted the soldiers to do their butchery.

But Oshima liked to be in on the kill. And so he came up to this new prisoner with the friendly Chinese face. How dared he wear the uniform of a Japanese general. Bushido must be avenged.

General Yoshida uttered an agonizing shriek as Oshima seized a rifle from one of the guards.

A single vicious thrust of the bayonet and Yoshida's heart was impaled. Oshima smiled. He seldom missed. Death by a single blow. It was rather a pity that the prisoner had not been subjected to torture, for torture gave the soldiers something to do, kept them near camp, for there were no theatres nearby and when they were too long without action, the troops grew restless.

All day the body of Yoshida lay where it had fallen. He was very fortunate. His Chinese face was not even scratched. The operation by Fang Kan had been enormously successful.

