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"Tsang bent down and caught one of the men in a wrestler's grip, gave a grunt and a heave and lifted him over his head."

Tsang, Accessory

By JAMES W. BENNETT

A tale of a Chinese motion-picture company—kidnapping and murder in Shanghai—and a Chinese detective

THE peculiar genius of Tsang Ah-bou, a detective of the Shanghai Municipal Police, lay in his uncanny ability in playing the rôles which his calling demanded. It is a truism that all Chinese are born actors, but Tsang was the actor as the Occidental thinks of him. Once he had put on the habiliments of a character he *was* that character.

He was of the average height of the Shanghai Chinese—who are not tall—and in appearance, fat. The latter description, if unqualified, would do Tsang a grave injustice. His loosely fitting gray serge gown concealed muscles trained in jiu-jitsu and of an iron-like hardness. He wore thick, myopic-lensed spectacles and suffered a considerable disability when

some disguise forced him to lay these aside.

Although unknown to the public, Tsang had won the confidence of many foreigners in Shanghai, men in high station. As for his Chief, Lluellan, a tall grim Welshman, that individual would occasionally wax lyrical in praise of Tsang.

Terence O'Conner had never had the privilege of meeting the Chinese detective. In fact he had had no dealings whatsoever with the Municipal Police of Shanghai's International City. However, he was now engaged in making this connection.

He was sitting with a hand on the desk telephone of the office of that new organization, "Oriental Motion Pictures, Limited, Shanghai." More than that, he was staring with somber intensity, not unmingled with horror, at a crumpled figure on the floor of the office. The figure was clad in a heliotrope satin gown. From the chin carefully depended seven long black hairs, mute evidence of an Oriental vanity and a desire to grow a beard. It was a vanity that was now forever thwarted, for the upper portion of the figure's head had been crushed in. The body gave evidence by its rigidity of having been a corpse for some time.

O'Conner turned away, lifted the telephone from the hook and asked the masculine Chinese Central to connect him with Police Headquarters. A Scotch desk sergeant answered the call.

"I want to report a murder," said O'Conner steadily. "I am the producer and director of the Oriental Motion Picture Company. I came into my office just five minutes ago, and I found Li Tsing—Mr. Li, we always called him—stretched on the floor, dead. Two chairs were overturned and the desk pulled out. He had been attacked with a blunt instrument, although there is no sign of the weapon——"

"An' have ye touched the body?" interrupted the sergeant.

"Of course! I tried to make an examination."

The police officer clucked disparagingly. "Well, what did ye find in yer examination?"

"Just what I was trying to tell you: apparently the only wound he received was on the head. Mr. Li was my male star actor. We were right in the middle of a film, too!" O'Conner's voice rose querulously. "Of all times for him to get mixed up in a feud! For I suppose that is what it was. Some *tong* war——"

"Nonsense!" the sergeant again interrupted. "There's no such a thing as a *tong* in Shanghai. That's for them trascal Cantonese who emigrated over to Amerrica and learned Amerrikan ways. Had the said Li any pairrsonal enemies?"

"Not that I know of—yes, wait a moment. There's another Oriental picture company here, an older organization that has no foreigners connected with it. Called Ta Ching Cinema, Limited. The rivalry between Mr. Li and the leading man of the Ta Ching has been high. I've been warned to look after my man, or the older company would try to 'noble' him."

O'Conner fell silent, and a stillness from the other end of the line indicated that the sergeant was putting down this information on the police blotter. At length the Scotchman queried:

"Any other places wherre ye might be suspectin' foul play?"

The director paused appreciably before answering. "It's not much of a suspicion. And, if I tell it to you, will you promise not to have the person arrested?"

"That depends," answered the desk sergeant cannily.

"But I can't have any arrests! I'm going to be crippled now finishing this

picture. I'll have to find a substitute for Mr. Li——"

"Well, come, come, who was it ye do be suspectin' also?"

O'Conner sighed. "Now that I've started, I suppose I must finish. It's the woman who plays opposite Mr. Li. Miss Laura Sun, a Chinese girl, our other star. They hated each other like blazes."

"'Hated — like — blazes,'" mechanically repeated the voice of the sergeant, evidently adding this to the blotter. "Why?"

"Why!" The director snorted. "Each thought he should be the only star. The usual thing. Li was the main offender. Rutherford, my camera man, used to get so angry that he swore he'd bash Li's head in, if the man didn't stop hogging the footage——"

"What's that?" The sergeant's voice was crisp. "Did ye say that one of yer employees, name of Rutherford, threatened to bash the said Li's head in?"

O'Conner gave an embarrassed laugh. "Oh, that was just a manner of speaking. It's proverbial that a camera man should dislike a star actor. One wants the composition of the picture to be right; the other simply aches to get his face in the middle of things."

"Did either Miss Sun or Mr. Rutherford openly threaten the life of said Li——other than Rutherford's statement about bashin' in heads?"

"Now, see here, Sergeant, I've told you all that I know!"

"Very well. I'll send one of our operatives down at once. He's a Chinese, name of Tsang Ah-bou. He'll straighten things out in amazin' quick time."

The director frowned into the mouth-piece of the telephone. "Good Lord, do we have to have a *Chinese* detective? Right at this moment, I'm a little fed up with Orientals. This is my first experi-

ence producing in the Orient and, so help me, it's going to be my last!"

The desk sergeant gave a discreet chuckle. "I know how you feel, sir. The Chinese do bedevil me, sometimes, until I fairr' want to break a few heads—but I beg yer parrdon! I forgot for a moment that the case before us was of a brroken head. I need yer co-operation in this, so I'll humor you by comin' down, myself. I think fer once the Scotch and the Irish can get together, Muster O'Conner."

"I'm not Irish," the director answered swiftly. "I'm an American. Born and raised in Hollywood. Terence O'Conner is the stage name I took when I went into directing. My name is, actually, Smith, as I can show you on my passport."

Again a pause. Then the sergeant's voice, ponderous, inexorable: "Terence O'Conner—*alias*—Smith."

"*Wha!*—oh, see here, Sergeant! You don't suspect *me*, do you? I just came down to the office five minutes ago and found Mr. Li's body. Why, I'm the last person in the world who—oh, it's ridiculous! Do you think I'd throw a monkey wrench into the machinery, right in the middle of a film? I was so anxious that nothing should go wrong that I had Li's life insured, only last week——"

"In yer own favor, Muster O'Conner?"

The director's voice grated. "No, not in my own favor! In the company's. The amount was only for ten thousand; and since the film will cost more than a hundred thousand, I'd hardly be murdering——"

"Now, now, sir, don't you be gettin' heated up! I must get all the facts. I do not suspect you. I suspect no one until the investigatin' is done. But, just for the sake of gettin' things all strraight, would ye mind tellin' me if *you* ever quarreled with said Li?"

O'Conner at once calmed down. "I'm

sorry I broke out as I did, Sergeant. Naturally I'm upset—sitting here, facing this ghastly tragedy as I talk with you. No, I've never quarreled with Mr. Li. Once I fined him pretty heavily for not appearing on the lot, two days running, when he was due in a series of sequences. Apparently he had been having a bout with the pipe, for he staggered in the third day, with his eyes the size of pin-points and looking like a wreck. That means opium, doesn't it?"

"It do," replied the sergeant dryly. "Which brings up another point: where did he get his opium?"

"How on earth should I know that?"

"No, I don't suppose you do. We'll try to run that down. Actorr smokin' opium. There may be our solution: he might have been smuggling it, on the side, and have been hi-jacked. There do be the most unlikely folk engagin' themselves in that. The last ye'd ever suspect."

O'Conner laughed. "As long as you don't suspect me! I don't even know what opium looks like. It's a brown powder, isn't it?"

"It is not!" said the sergeant ponderously. "It's brown, all right, but it's a fearful, sticky gum. But do you think said Li might have been engaged in smugglin' it with a member of yer company?"

"It's possible, Sergeant. We've engaged scores of extra people."

"But not, say, Miss Laura Sun?"

"It would seem to me that they hated each other too much to be partners in anything."

"Then, how about Rutherford, yer camera man?"

"That seems extremely unlikely, Sergeant, although I know very little about Rutherford. He's a queer young fellow. Moody, not talkative. I don't know what he does with himself, when he's off the lot. We don't live at the same hotel."

"How long have you known him?"

"About four months. I met him in Hollywood, just before we sailed. I advertised for a camera man and he answered the ad. The samples he showed me were excellent, so I hired him."

Once again that ponderous voice, just catching up with O'Conner's quick, nervous speech:

"'Known Rutherford—four months—his past shrouded—his nights spent suspiciously——'" A pause. "All right, Muster O'Conner. I'll be right over. You'd be surprized how few murderers get out of our net! You'd be surprized!"

"I'm sure I would, Sergeant. And believe me, I won't feel safe, myself, until he is netted. I may even be next!"

"Yes," agreed the sergeant earnestly. "Yes, ye may be, at that!"

2

NOEL RUTHERFORD sat with his back pressed hard against the rungs of a wooden chair. On the floor of Terence O'Conner's office the body of Mr. Li still sprawled. Rutherford kept his eyes carefully away from the spectacle of death. He was scowling.

Seated opposite him, face impassive, was Fergus Andrews, the sergeant of the Shanghai Municipal Police who had taken down O'Conner's story over the telephone. Andrews was saying stolidly:

"Why can't ye remember when ye had a quarrel wi' Muster Li?"

"Because I can't, that's all! I've been too busy. I'm doing all the photography for the entire job here."

"Even so——"

"Yes, even so! Why should I have stopped my work and said: 'Now, I must remember this; I must fix it in my mind! Because later a fat-headed policeman is going to come and ask me all about it!'"

The words were flung out by Ruther-

ford with a reckless disregard for their probable repercussions. Then his mouth lost its scowl; it softened to a smile of recognition. A girl had appeared at the door, a small, piquant figure garbed in old-rose silks banded with silver, her ebony hair smoothed back like a cap of lacquer. The camera man's eyes suddenly glinted with fear. He spoke urgently:

"Run away, Laura! *Please!*"

The Chinese girl obeyed, but not before she had glimpsed the sprawled, grotesque shape on the floor. For an instant her body had gone rigid. Her face, however, had remained expressionless.

"And who might that geyrrl be?" demanded Andrews curtly.

"Laura Sun, our leading woman," answered Rutherford with equal curtness. He paused an instant and then burst out: "And, see here, don't you bring her into this! She has nothing to do with the killing of that swine there!"

"See here, young fellow, you'll get along much better for yourself if you try answerin' me wi' a bit of civility——"

"Oh, it's civility you want?" interposed the young camera man in the same reckless tone. "Why should I be civil? You've made up your mind that I committed the murder! Just because I've had words with Li." His voice lifted a notch and the lips twitched nervously. "Well, I'll add to that. Not only have I threatened to bash in Li's head, but I've promised him a raw-hiding; I've threatened to drown him, to tie him to a railroad track. And why? Because he was the nastiest, slimiest worm that ever tried to disguise himself as a human being. A rotter if there ever was——"

"Wait a moment," cut in the sergeant. "Is it because he is Chinese that ye felt so provoked wi' him?"

"No, of course not. The other Chinese on the lot are as decent a crew as you

could ask for. You'd have to go a long way in Hollywood to get a cast of white men that are as honest and hardworking. But Li—he was all bad. And he made life a purple hell on earth for poor little Miss Sun."

"And I suppose you defended her?" Andrews asked.

"I did my best. The trouble was, he usually waited to begin his indecent proposals until they were playing a scene together. When she was supposed to be registering love for him, he'd spring something hot. I don't know the Chinese language, but I know that what he said was steamy. The extras would cackle and Miss Sun would cringe back and spoil the scene. There's no question in my mind that Li wanted her out of the way; wanted to wear her down and force her to resign——"

"Now, wait a moment," checked Andrews. "Where was O'Conner when this was goin' on?"

"O'Conner was there. He didn't like it, and he told Li so. But Li had been buttering O'Conner up and the Chief was always making excuses for him. To give the devil his due, Li could be a superb actor when he wanted to be. And Laura Sun—although she's lovely, as you saw—isn't in the same acting class with Li."

Andrews was silent a moment; then he asked: "Does O'Conner speak Chinese?"

"No. We've had to depend upon interpreters. Mr. Li did most of that. Miss Sun does a little. She was born in San Francisco and she speaks better English than she does her native tongue. As a matter of fact, if she hadn't been bilingual I doubt if she could have held her job. Her brain is keen, but there are moments when it doesn't seem to function before the camera."

"You say that the said Li acted as in-

terpreter. Where did he learn English? Here?"

"No, in America. O'Conner can tell you about him. I understand that he picked Li up in Hollywood. Li was acting as some sort of expert on Oriental *décor* there. The Chief brought Li over with him. Miss Sun we found here—or rather I found her. She came to me when we were first casting and begged so hard for a position that I more or less took her under my wing."

Andrews drummed for an uncertain moment with his heavy spatulate fingers upon the arm of O'Conner's desk chair. Then, with the air of a man who has made up his mind, he demanded:

"Could Muster O'Conner get a camera man to take yer place?"

Rutherford's eyes widened. "Yes. So, you're—arresting me?"

Andrews looked at him stolidly. "You're a wee bit in lo' wi' the little Chinese lass, I'm thinking. Perhaps Miss Sun has done it. And if she did, ye know all the saircumstances——"

"Oh, by all means, accuse Miss Sun!" Rutherford flung out, his voice rising to a sharp, hysterical pitch. "Arrest her, too, you fat-witted harness bull! She *would* be likely to kill Li! She's so big and strong! Take a good look at her wrists and hands, and try to imagine them lifting a club and doing *that!*" pointing with a shaking finger at the crumpled figure on the office floor.

"It ud be possible for her," commented Andrews imperturbably.

The camera man appeared dashed by the calm words. His tone changed. "But Sergeant, she's not a day over seventeen, only a child!"

"Aye, but old enou' to be turnnin' men's heads and causin' all sorts of bletcher and commotion and sudden death." Andrews hesitated an instant and then went on, his voice almost gentle,

"I do be beggin' yer pardon for this."

His large hands went out with a motion incredibly quick . . . and Rutherford found himself looking stupidly down at a pair of shining manacles that braceleted his wrists.

3

THE tall, elderly Chinese clad in the garish satins of the Chapei tea houses—which in China corresponds to the garb of a Rialto racketeer—smiled ingratiatingly at O'Conner. He had been buttonholing the director for nearly an hour. At last he reached the meat of his discourse:

"I have velly fine leading man fo' you, sir. A great actor tempolalily out of job. True, he talk' no English, but *I* shall be at hand to make translating. So you will get *me*, as well as——"

"Yes," interrupted O'Conner impatiently, "I know; we'll be getting your services as interpreter; you've been telling me that for half an hour; but how about the actor?"

"I am coming to that," went on the elderly Chinese calmly. "But as you foreigners say, hastings make wastings. In addition to my unusual and fine serv-icings, you get the incomp'able actor, Mr. Ch'ung. He has acted on stages of Peiping, Tientsin, Cheefoo, Tsingtao, Tsinan, Ichang, Hankow, Kiukiang, Chinking——"

O'Conner made an ineffectual grab at his fast-disappearing patience and missed. He interrupted to say: "All right! All *right!* I'll take your word for it that this Ch'ung has performed all over the map. But stage and screen acting are two different affairs. He may not screen well. And the main point is: does he look like Mr. Li? I can train a ham actor, but even I can't doctor up a picture to make a six-footer look like one that's only five-

feet-seven. Mr. Li was not tall, and his face was round."

The elderly Chinese waved his hands in the air soothingly. "But Mr. Ch'ung look' exactly like Mr. Li. All same his twin blother. Mr. Ch'ung is outside now."

This was too much for O'Conner. "Good Lord! Here I've wasted a third of a morning and all the time the man was here! Bring him in! We'll find out whether or not he's Li's twin brother!"

The elderly Chinese moved leisurely to the door and gave a shrill call. In response, there sidled sheepishly into the room an embarrassed-looking Oriental of thirty, gorgeously caparisoned. He was of Mr. Li's height and the face was authentically the full moon with slant eyes that the late lamented actor had possessed. But there the resemblance ended. Where Li had been thin to the point of cadaverousness, this actor verged on corpulence.

O'Conner suddenly moaned. "Take this man out!" he said feebly. "Take him away! He's forty pounds overweight! He's beefy!"

The elderly interpreter looked worried. He conferred for a moment with his charge. The latter began peeling off an outer jacket, a crape under jacket and then the loose silken shirt next to the skin.

"Here! What's the matter?" muttered O'Conner, startled. "Why the disrobing act? I'm not making any pictures of Aphrodite!"

"But, sir, I show you that Mr. Ch'ung is not beefsy, as you complain. No fat on him. All muscles."

In spite of himself, O'Conner was caught by the sinewy, beautifully developed brown torso that was revealed.

"He's an athlete, isn't he? Looks like a wrestler. . . . Hum . . . I wonder if I couldn't use him. Make him do a few

stunts. He ought to be able to. . . . Yes . . . I could——" O'Conner broke off. He had been talking to himself. Now he turned to the interpreter. "First I must give him a screen test; also, find out if he can act for nuts. You——" jerking a hand toward the newest Thespian——"you——come on."

The small but husky Chinese trotted obediently toward the door. As the pair, followed by the elderly interpreter, were walking across the lot, Sergeant Andrews appeared. O'Conner hailed him.

"Well, Sergeant, I think I've found a substitute for Li. I was growing pretty discouraged. I've had to give up the idea of getting an absolute double for Li. Funny thing, you think that all Chinese look alike——until you try to duplicate 'em! This man doesn't look like Li in the least, but I'm playing a hunch. I'm going to turn my picture upside down, begin all over again, change it to a stunt production. I'll make this new man engage upon a few high, wide and handsome fights. He looks like a fighter——stripped to the buff. Which is more than you can say about most Chinese. I don't think it's ever been done in an Oriental film. If he lives through the mill, perhaps I'll have a picture that will make me not regret Mr. Li's passing to the Great Beyond."

Sergeant Andrews had listened with a mouth that drooped wider and wider. With an effort he closed it and then said:

"Muster O'Conner, did you say that you were goin' to make a dare-de'il of this new man? A stunter?"

"That's it! A parachute drop or so from an airplane. A jump from a moving train to a motor car, and back again."

"My God!" muttered the Scotchman. "See here, O'Conner, you can't do——"

He stopped, for the actor who had paused near by was suddenly taken with a cough, a loud nasty cough that blanked

Andrews' words. As the Scotchman left the lot a moment later, he shook his head.

"Ah, puir Tsang Ah-bou," he said mournfully to himself. "Dropped from an airplane in a parrachute! I'm thinkin' this will be his last assignment—an' he the finest detective that ever wore his shirt outside his breeks! But that was a rousing cough he gave. I'm not the man to stop him if he's decided upon a courrrse of action. Aye, I'll not soon forget the tongue-lashin' he handed me for two weary hours, the time I gave away one of his disguises. Fairr blistered me, he did. . . . But jumpin' from a automobile to a movin' ttrain! Ah, puir Tsang Ah-bou!"

4

SERGEANT ANDREWS had been able to recognize in the newly acquired actor his associate on the force only by reason of the set of those brown, muscular shoulders. What Tsang had done to his face, what subtle yet profound changes he had made in its lines and planes, the Scotchman did not know; nor, for that matter, did any one else on the staff. Tsang kept his methods secret.

He entered upon his new rôle of cinema stunt actor with the calm fatality of the Oriental who has an unhappy task to perform which can not be shirked.

O'Conner, on the other hand, was delighted. What his newest find lacked in acting technique—and his deficiencies were tremendous—he made up in courage, even in daring.

The danger and arduousness of the work did not, however, prevent Tsang from carrying on the real work underlying his strenuous play-acting. He moved about among the lowly extra people in a way that would have shocked the defunct Mr. Li, who had held himself

grandly aloof from the mixed sweepings of the street that made up the mob scenes.

Clues, Tsang found. He discovered such a maze of them that he was bewildered. They led in too many directions, implicating too many persons. One conclusion he did reach which he embodied in a letter to Lluellan, his Chief. The letter read:

"Respectfully request that you release Rutherford. If he is unable to furnish bail, I shall guarantee it. Release him on condition he remains in Shanghai and again takes up his duties as camera man. The camera man who is substituting for him is very poor; he does not do justice to me as an actor, thus arousing in my breast large professional pride, for I think I am going to make fine cinema actor. Who knows, I may resign my position as weary human bloodhound and become grimacing doll who smiles when the honorable O'Conner says, 'Smile,' and who knocks down inoffensive actors when he says, 'Knock.'"

The letter was unsigned, but Tsang had added a postscript:

"If this case ever ends, I shall put in a bill for damages as follows:

"One large bump over right eye.

"One rib which I believe cracked, or if not cracked at least greatly contused.

"One long finger nail, grown with great care over period of years, vanished.

"One sprain on right largest toe, obtained by kicking most pleasant man who has the misfortune to play part of villain.

"That is bill to the present. The future may see list long as my arm. The money value of such damages I leave to your judgment. But if the eminent Auditor of the Municipal Council endeavors to say that such damagings were sustained in the 'normal' course of my duties as detective, you will kindly advise him that I shall resign promptly and in great anger. For I feel that the treatment I am now receiving is most 'un-normal.' At moments I am even envious of the defunct Mr. Li."

Lluellan read this communication, laughed, frowned, swore and laughed again. His impulse was to recall Tsang. The most valuable man on the force shouldn't be permitted to run such risks! Yet, the Police Chief knew that Tsang would sulk for weeks if interfered with. And the Chinese detective had elected to take this risk.

He rang a bell, summoned a warder and ordered that Rutherford be brought to his office. The young camera man appeared, his clothes grimy. He was badly shaven and his eyes were bloodshot. Without preliminary, he began to speak:

"I've been thinking. Haven't slept. No use you chaps investigating any farther. I'll come clean. I—well, I bilked that filthy Li. I came across him, early that morning, in the office—before the others came. He was chivvying poor Miss Sun. I saw red, I guess. I hardly know what did happen, except that I swung on him. The next thing I knew, he was lying at my feet—smashed up, dead."

Lluellan eyed the boy pleasantly. "I see. Was Miss Sun with you, when this happened?"

"No!" Rutherford burst out. "I should say not! She knew nothing about it. I—trolled Li into the office."

Lluellan's smile broadened slightly. "I thought you just said that Li was—'chivvying' was the word you used—chivvying Miss Sun, when you set upon him?"

"That's right, sir. I sent her out of the office, first."

"What sort of instrument did you use?"

"What——?" Rutherford's eyes were startled.

"I said, what sort of instrument did you use?"

"Oh!" The young camera man paused. "A cane—a walking-stick. I threw it away."

"Could you find it again?"

"I? No. No, of course not. I haven't the faintest idea where I threw the board——"

"Walking-stick, don't you mean, Rutherford?"

"Yes, stick. What did I say, a board? Perhaps it was a piece of board." The young man's voice rose. "Li didn't de-

serve to live! He was a rotter, I tell you! He——"

"Hold up, Rutherford. I'd advise you not to try confessing any more. And don't tell any one else what you've just told me." Lluellan's face lost its genial smile, becoming remote and grave. "Do you know, Shanghai is the most unconventional city on the face of the globe, and I think our Police Force tops the list of its unconventionalities. In spite of this confession of yours, I am releasing you. Right now. You will give me your word that you won't leave Shanghai. That you will go back to your work as if nothing had happened. In return for this, if you are asked to give us any aid, I shall expect you to do so."

Rutherford's hand went to his forehead. It was evident to Lluellan that the camera man was battling with some temptation. But he downed it apparently, for he spoke coldly:

"I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think I want my freedom under such terms. I can't make that promise."

"You mean, if we cast the net too tightly about Miss Sun?"

"I mean, if you try to spin a net for her!"

"That's splitting hairs, Rutherford. However, we're not inhuman. If it turns out to be Miss Sun, we won't demand your aid. Besides, one of my operatives is conducting this case. I can depend upon him eventually to produce irrefutable proof."

"One of your operatives?" demanded the camera man with sudden interest.

Lluellan caught the strained quality of the question. If before he had doubted the wisdom of Rutherford's release, he did not do so now. The camera man would be directly under Tsang's observation. He nodded and spoke with easy mendacity:

"Yes, we have an American on the

job. You'll probably see him snooping about the lot—although he's pretty clever and you may not notice him. Now, have I your promise to go back to your job and to stay there?"

"Yes." Rutherford's answer was lifeless, uncaring.

5

NOEL RUTHERFORD returned to find work on the lot limping, for lack of an adequate camera man. O'Conner had been making shift with a Chinese whose experience was of the news-reel variety. The man had a certain knack for taking mob scenes and for grouping, but beyond that his ignorance of camera technique was sublime. . . . The director gave a shout, pounded Rutherford delightedly on the back and sent the news-camera man hurriedly into limbo.

After hearing Rutherford's story—minus the confession, which the camera man deleted—O'Conner said excitedly:

"Noel, I've got a new leading man in Li's place that's a world-beater. Talk about falling into a muddy ditch and coming up, smelling of attar of roses! A Chinese be-man! And willing? Not once has he had hysterics and screamed for smelling-salts, as Li used to do. And he can stage a fight like nobody's business!"

"Can he act?"

O'Conner shrugged. "Well, to tell you the truth, as a trouper, he's about on a par with Miss Sun. None of Li's fine points. There were moments when Li had sparks of real genius."

"Yes," agreed Rutherford sourly. "Yes, when he wasn't busy pinching Miss Sun's arm—to make her screw up her face and spoil footage."

The director laughed. "Oh, see here, Noel, let's not go into that old argument. Li's dead. Give the devil his due——"

O'Conner broke off and beckoned to a

Chinese, bare to the waist, carrying a two-edged warrior's sword.

"Ch'ung! Come here a moment!"

The Chinese did not move.

"Oh, hell, I keep forgetting that he can't understand English!" The director's voice rose to a bellow: "Cha! Hey, Cha! Where in blue bloody blazes are you? I wish you wouldn't be forever doing a fadeout when I want you! Cha!—Oh, there you are, are you?"

The tall, meager figure of the interpreter came with hurt dignity and very slowly from behind the canvas scenery. He spoke with shrill peevishness:

"Aw light, Mista O'Connah, aw light, aw light. What you want?"

"Bring our two-fisted leading man over here. I want him to meet Rutherford, my old camera man."

The introductions were made. The new masculine star bowed with a certain dignity which he did not lose, even though bare from the waist up.

But the gaze of the young camera man swept past the actor to a small figure in gay satins that stood lonely yet expectant, a short distance from the group. Laura Sun was smiling straight into Rutherford's eyes. He took an eager step forward, but she gave the barest negative shake of the head. He checked himself and turned elaborately back to the new leading man, who was engaged at that instant in telling him—via interpreter—that he, Ch'ung, was shocked with delight to meet the exalted and prior-born Rutherford.

Yet, in spite of his preoccupation with the amenities of introduction, the new actor's eyes were sharp. They had darted from one to the other of this pair: to Rutherford, handsome and reckless in Western fashion; to Laura Sun, beautiful as Chinese women many times are beautiful, with the fragility of Chien Lung porcelain, with the smooth, gold-tinted

skin of imperial lacquer. Like a powerful spark, leaping a wide arc, a message had passed between them, too fast for Tsang Ah-bou to read.

6

LATE that afternoon, when the work for the day was ended, the extras continued to linger. The studio exerted a moth-and-the-flame fascination. It was a place of topsy-turvy morals, even of downright wickedness; for, to them, many of the acts which O'Conner in all innocence demanded of Miss Sun and of his extra women were highly obscene. . . . In real life, no Chinese woman, even under stress of the deepest emotion, would permit herself to cradle the battered head of the hero on her shoulder—not even though he had fainted from loss of blood after rescuing her from the villain. By dangerously stretching a point, she might fan him, or recite a poem which she had composed on the spot to his valor. But all the while she should be staring fixedly in the direction of her father's home and showing a marked anxiety for her parent to appear and thus regularize her being alone—if only for a moment—with the hero.

Tsang Ah-bou could have told O'Conner that he was storing up trouble, applying the rules and canons of the Occident to a film that would be exhibited to a purely Oriental audience. But, being an Oriental himself, trained in one cardinal rule of the East: never to meddle in matters not directly concerning him and his real profession as detective, Tsang said nothing. As "Ch'ung," dare-devil of the film, he silently and doggedly obeyed orders.

Tsang had not been engaged long in his new work before he heard that the rival motion picture concern, the Ta Ching Cinema Company, was laughing

up its long sleeves at O'Conner's insanities. Their leading man, particularly, was reported to be loudest in his titterings. He was said not only to be laughing but to be making strange statements that would bear examination. Added to that, there was the former rivalry between him and Mr. Li of which O'Conner had told the police. Therefore, the evening of Rutherford's return, Tsang decided to investigate the Ta Ching matter, and promptly left the lot.

Going by devious paths to his home, where as a Chinese gentleman Tsang dwelt in peace and amity with his three wives, he patiently removed the bits of plastic clay that had transformed him from Tsang Ah-bou, a detective, to Ch'ung, an actor.

When again he left his home, Tsang was once more in disguise, but this time an entirely new one. He was now clad in the flashy silks of a sporting man. After a moment of thought, he directed his rickshaw to the House of the Ten Thousand Gilded Songbirds, a flamboyant, baroque edifice near the Willow Pattern Bridge. The choice was made because the tea house was the popular rendezvous of the moment for those who indulged in Chinese "hi-life."

His guess proved sound. In the center of the room, busily cracking and eating sunflower seeds, drinking too heartily of triple-distilled rice brandy, sat a tall, youthful Chinese clad in purple silk. When not eating and drinking, the purple one was talking—loudly. About him hung a group of sycophants. He was not unaware of the sensation he was creating, for a pleased smile played continually upon his lips. Confidently Tsang joined the group of admirers. The man's small, cold eyes darted to Tsang and he paused in his monologue. To fill the gap, the detective spoke:

"May this humble worm be permitted

to join your circle, ineffable Waung? Your blinding effulgence has so penetrated the land, that this person has traveled from the benighted hamlet of his birth—too small to permit a cinema—all the way to Shanghai, solely to view your superb face on the screen. But, to see you now in person! That is a pleasure so great that this slug-like one is overcome!"

The young actor bowed. Deliberately he unfurled a fan. The motion was as graceful as the dip of a swallow. Then he answered Tsang with a stereotyped humility that failed to hide an underlying arrogance.

The actor then continued what evidently was a narration of the extraordinary blunders committed by the Ta Ching's rival company, O'Conner's outfit. The purple one even confessed that he had put in a day as an extra, garbed in coolie cloth, and that his priceless face would be found in one of O'Conner's mob scenes. By this, Tsang shrewdly deduced that the Ta Ching Company—for all its bravado—had been more than a little worried by the appearance of a rival company in a field that had previously been theirs alone. Then, from a criticism of O'Conner, Waung turned to the work of the director's new leading man. Holding his mouth to the contours of a smile, Tsang listened.

"Their leading man, Ch'ung," said the young actor, "is a strange sea-cucumber! His shoulders are broad like a water buffalo's and just as poetic. His face is as expressionless as a sun-clock on a rainy day. When asked to portray hate, he shows joy. When asked to show fear, he shows nothing. For he has the courage of a clod and does not know what fear means. In that he is like the silly Western Ocean barbarians."

Here, Tsang knew, the actor offered the most scathing criticism of all, since the normal Chinese links hardihood with

imbecility, and sees no saving grace in recklessness.

The purple one drank deeply. One of his satellites queried:

"But what think you of their first leading man, Li?"

"Li was very good," answered the actor magnanimously. "True, he was broken down from too much opium. But why should he put much stomach into his work? With the leading woman that he had!"

Tsang asked, "What is your opinion of Miss Sun?"

Waung gave a shout of derisive laughter. "She? She plays in the style of the ugly barbarian women from the country of Huh-luh-wuh [Hollywood]. As for Li——" And Waung rambled on. He did not make the mistake of crassly running down the murdered man, but by dealing in innuendoes he succeeded thoroughly in blasting Li's reputation. He was drinking more and more rice brandy as he talked—thanks to Tsang's quiet word to the waiter that Waung's cup be kept continually filled. At last he gave a maudlin leer and announced with great gravity: "Li failed because he tempted the gods. He died because he tempted them. I am the one that the gods have chosen to become the supreme cinema actor of China. If I wanted, I could tell you a thing or two about Li's death!"

He paused and stared blearily at the faces which had hitherto been turned to him with admiration. Now they were flawed with fear. One man spoke:

"Heaven-smiting Waung, be careful! Remember that the murderer of the unessential Li has yet to be apprehended."

The actor laughed recklessly. "You mean that *this* person killed Li? Well, perhaps I did. But not in the way you think!" His lips pursed with maudlin secretiveness. "You'd like to know what

I mean by that, wouldn't you? Well, I'll tell you one thing: I was the last one with Li, alive. He dined with me here, at this very table, the night that he died. And he told me of a quarrel he had been having with his leading woman and with the Mei-guo [American] camera man. But neither of these was the cause of Li's death. . . . There was another . . . cause. . . ."

Waung's voice had grown abruptly drowsy and it tailed off into silence. He sat nodding his head, then jerking it up again. Tsang Ah-bou rose. With a shrug and a polite bow of farewell to the group, he left the table and the building.

7.

RUTHERFORD and Tsang Ah-bou each alighted from the same tram car near the studio, the following morning. Tsang had been economically traveling third class on the trailer, while the camera man, being a foreigner, had been forced to ride in the first class.

The American nodded coldly. Tsang, however, smiled as wide and friendly a smile as he could—in view of the materials placed on his middle-aged countenance to give it a more youthful appearance. He fell into step beside the camera man. Rutherford gave him a glance of annoyance but said nothing. They traversed a block in silence; then the American was astonished to hear the actor say in heavily accented Pidgin-English:

"Please do not tell any one dat I speak your language. I speak it so velly little that it seem bettah to say I do not speak it at all. Then no one can get angry with me when I not savvy evvathing, see?"

The suspicion that had first dawned in Rutherford's eyes now faded. The Chinese actor's explanation was rational. However, the camera man's frown did not relax. The day before he had caught the

man doing one of Li's old tricks, deliberately stealing footage from Laura Sun. . . . But what Rutherford did not know was that Tsang had waited until the camera man's eyes were on him, to try this experiment. The detective had seen the red fury mount in the young American's face.

As the pair walked along, Tsang continued to talk: "I work pretty hard now. Surely the honorable Li did not have to fight evvabody, as I do. Today I mus' jump from Lung Hwa Pagoda into net at bottom. I hear that picture will show me making jump but will not show net; so it look as though I fall great distance." Tsang's voice grew plaintive: "What man will think that I am such a big foolo as to jump from tower, just to save the life of girl? Chinese man will all say: 'Why so much troube' about one girl? If no can get this one, get another. Girl is cheap.'"

Rutherford turned, scowling. "You would think that way! You Orientals are so damned selfish."

Tsang continued, his serenity unruffled: "But Mr. Li did not have to do the things I do. Maybe that was why he was kill'. Maybe he said to somebody: 'No, I will not jump from the tower into a net!' Then, bang, bang, somebody got mad and hit him over the head."

An unwilling smile came to Rutherford's lips. "That's a new theory of the murder: that Li was killed for insubordination. No, the Chief didn't bilk Li, for not obeying orders. He's a white man, O'Conner is. I suppose you Chinese on the lot *are* speculating over who killed Li. Well, my advice to you is to stop it! Then you'll get into no trouble!" A sharp edge had come into his voice.

"Oha, yes!" Tsang promptly agreed.

Then he threw up his head in a listening attitude. They were just then entering the studio. In the distance, within,

some one was cursing in English. The sound drew nearer; then suddenly O'Conner shot around a corner, his hair tousled. Catching sight of Tsang Ah-bou, the director pounded toward him.

"You, Ch'ung, damn you to hell! What have you done with Laura Sun?"

Tsang's face became blank. "Uh?"

"Laura Sun! Laura Sun!—you infernal, kidnapping bandit! You had your nerve, coming back here to the studio today! I suppose you thought we shouldn't learn of it, though——"

Rutherford blanked any further utterance by shouting: "Terence, what are you saying? Is Laura gone?"

"I'll tell the cockeyed world she's gone! And there's the man who's responsible for it!"

O'Conner and Rutherford each caught Tsang by an arm, their grasp cruel. Then the director went on passionately:

"I don't know whether to take the law into my own hands and horsewhip him before the entire cast, or turn him over to the police. I'm afraid if I start whipping, I'll kill him." O'Conner turned and set up the familiar shout: "Cha? Cha? You malingerer, where in blazes are you? Come here!"

With great dignity, a tall gaunt figure rose from the canvas chair marked, "O'Conner—reserved for Use of Director only."

"Aw light," answered the interpreter in his high, disapproving voice. "What you want me to translate to the honorable Ch'ung?"

"Tell him—tell him—wait a moment! I believe I'll give him one chance to redeem himself. Tell him he's got to bring Miss Sun back to the lot, here, by this time tomorrow. If he fails, I'll send him to the hoosegow——"

"Huh?" interrupted Cha.

"Hoosgow—to jail, prison!" O'Conner fumbled in the pocket of his coat and

pulled forth a bit of crumpled, soiled paper upon which words had been scrawled by a dull-leaded pencil. "Now, translate this, Cha. And don't make any mistakes. I want him to realize that he's been found out."

Tonelessly Cha read:

"Dear Mr. O'Conner,—

"I am taking this one stolen opportunity to write, although my note may never reach you. I have been captured. Where I am I do not know—nor why. There is no talk of ransom, only of killing me. I am promising a small fortune to a boy of the gang if he will drop this in a post box. I dare not write more—except to say that Ch'ung, your new leading man, is spoken of repeatedly as the head of the group.

"LAURA SUN."

"There, you see?" began O'Conner, only to be interrupted by Rutherford. The camera man gave an insane bellow and struck viciously at Tsang. Instinctively the little Chinese dodged, but not enough; Rutherford's fist connected with his jaw. Tsang toppled backward, gave a whistling sigh and lost consciousness.

Rutherford would have leaped upon Tsang then, had not O'Conner, burly, and of the two the less excited, intervened.

"Hold up, Noel! You don't realize! This fine specimen of a gangster"—pointing to Tsang's limp body—"is worth more to us alive than dead. He's got to go out and bring Laura Sun back. She's given us our only clue."

The camera man stared at O'Conner for a dazed moment; then he nodded wearily. "Yes. Yes, of course. But it seems criminal to release him—to let him disappear among those millions in the Native City!"

"Not if I put the fear of God in him—before he starts!"

Tsang gave a grunt. The mists slowly cleared. "Ey-yah!" he muttered and sat up, feeling his jaw with an exploring hand. No. Fortunately those deceptive bits of clay which changed the contours of his face were undamaged; they had

been placed higher up, in the cheek hollows. Shakily reaching his feet, he spoke in Chinese to Cha:

"Let this person be permitted to look at that letter."

The elderly interpreter translated the request into English.

O'Conner gave a short, barking laugh and shook his head. "And have Ch'ung tear up this evidence against him? Not much!"

Again Tsang spoke to O'Conner, through Cha: "Take the letter into the office and compare it with specimens of Miss Sun's handwriting."

The director nodded and stalked to the office. Cha and Tsang Ah-bou followed. O'Conner opened a file and pulled forth Laura Sun's contract. He spoke:

"This is the only specimen of her writing that I have. I've already compared the signatures. They're the same. Look at them."

The little detective muttered under his breath. He was near-sighted, and his present disguise was one which did not permit him to wear glasses. A forgery? Who could have done it? Some one on the lot, with access to the office? O'Conner's sanctum was not difficult of entry; it was never locked. Tsang, in fact, had entered it and made a search, a few days previous, during an hour when he knew that O'Conner would be busy with a mob scene.

Could it have been Waung, the purple one? The leading man of the rival company had confessed to hiring himself as an extra, in order to spy upon O'Conner. It was a peculiarly Chinese type of plot, to steal the Oriental Motion Picture Company's leading woman and then try to fix the blame upon O'Conner's new leading man. Yet, would Waung have been so outspoken in his talk, the evening before, if he had committed such an act? . . .

Tsang came out of his brown study at the sight of O'Conner's eyes, cold with suspicion, bent upon him. He turned to Cha:

"Tell the heaven-born director that this person will make a search for Laura Sun. That I shall bring her back, if she is alive."

And Tsang walked out of the office, into the crowded, teeming Chinese street.

8

TSANG AH-BOU knew that a stiff job was before him, to find a Chinese girl, concealed somewhere in Shanghai's rabbit warren of two million inhabitants. Yet he knew his Shanghai, knew it intuitively. In addition, there were the usual ways of charting off a city, such as a Western detective would employ in New York or London. The scanning of police reports. A patrolman's notation that an unconscious woman had been carried into a building—for Laura Sun would hardly have gone peaceably unless rendered unconscious.

Then, there was still another city to be searched: Shanghai's Junktown. There lay a little world in microcosm, with its countless sampans and junks, its barges and lighters. There Chinese were born, lived, gave birth and died, rarely setting foot on land. Sampans loaded with fish and eels, fruit and vegetables, took care of their daily needs. A midwife's junk hovered in the offing when a baby was due to be born. A coffin boat hung unashamedly near at hand when some inhabitant of a junk lay fighting death. A secretive, closely knit little world that turned a suspicious face to all that dwelt on land.

Yet, even there, Tsang knew that the task was not insurmountable. The junk colonies each had its Headman, an elderly junkman who acted as arbiter of disputes and who exercised patriarchal rights over the fleet anchoring in his par-

ticular cove. Very little of an unusual nature on the water escaped his attention.

A step sounded behind Tsang. It was taking the same tempo as his own. Abruptly he wheeled. Rutherford was several paces behind him. The young camera man growled:

"Go on, Ch'ung! Don't stop! You're going to hunt Laura Sun today! And you're not going to quit, until you find her!"

"I know," agreed Tsang mildly. "That is what I try to do."

"And you're going to have company today—mine. If you make a single move to get away from me, you'll get a taste of *this!*"

Somewhat clumsily Rutherford drew from his pocket a small, shiny, not particularly lethal-appearing revolver.

"How long you had that?" asked Tsang.

"Since yesterday afternoon. When I saw you hogging all that footage from Laura, I doped you out to be another Li. Perhaps even a relation of his. I know how you Orientals stick together! And I figured if you started any revenge stuff for Li's death—well, my guess wasn't so far off; you started it, all right, by kidnapping her!" Rutherford looked somberly down at the revolver. "And a devil of a lot of good it did me to buy this! You stole her away right from under my nose."

"When you last see her?" Tsang asked with apparent casualness.

"None of your damned business."

Tsang spoke in a patient voice, as though to a child: "S'pose I am guilty; what harm to tell me that?"

"No harm, I guess. I walked to her hotel with her after work yesterday. I warned her against you, but she only laughed and said that she was in no danger. No danger! And you lurking just around the corner! . . . Well, let's get going. I don't care how you save your

face, how much pretended searching you do, just so long as you wind up at the spot where Laura is being kept. If you don't——"

"If I don't, you'll murder me?" asked Tsang softly.

"Yes! Yes, I'll—oh, I don't know what I'll do! I would hate you enough to kill you——" Rutherford's uncertain, unhappy tone changed; it became charged with its original bravado: "So don't tempt me too far! The sooner you find her, the better for you!"

With some difficulty, Tsang kept a frown from clouding his brow. The presence of Rutherford complicated things for him. How could he explain his action in entering the building plainly marked "Municipal Police" and a delay of an hour there, poring over Chinese patrolmen's reports for the past fifteen hours? In the Native City, the task would be less embarrassing; the Police *yamen* there did not advertise itself except by Chinese ideographs which Rutherford would not be able to decipher.

"Snap into it!" commanded Rutherford curtly. "And don't let any grass grow under your heels!"

Tsang thought of the old Chinese proverb: "Where the patient water buffalo with his slow but inexorable pace travels a thousand miles, the agile but changeably minded gazelle moves but a hundred."

9

TSANG'S first stop was neither at police station nor junk colony. He went to the Ta Ching Studios, the building which housed the purple one, Waung, the actor who had hinted of knowledge of the foul play which had caused Mr. Li's death. At the entrance, Tsang curtly demanded that Waung be summoned. The porter informed him dourly that the Heaven-smiting Waung was then engaged in a scene

and that not even Shang Ti, the Great Over-God, dared disturb him.

"Tell the miserable Waung," said Tsang in crisp Chinese, "that he may be willing to beard the wrath of Shang Ti, but he can not snap his fingers at the Shanghai Municipal Police. If he does not appear in five minutes, I shall telephone headquarters. A patrol wagon will come and your studios will be raided."

The porter gave Tsang an awed look, scurried away and, in a remarkably quick time, returned with Waung—today clad in a delicate shade of heliotrope satin. The young actor started. It was apparent that he did not recognize in Tsang the affable, middle-aged stranger of the tea-house, but he did recognize the leading man of the opposing motion picture camp. Waung said nastily:

"So, it's you, is it? You make me stop an important scene, because of a silly threat about a police raid. And, speaking of the police, if I ever find you here again, I'll have you arrested for trespass!"

"I think you are forgetting, miserable Waung, about the statement you made last night—before witnesses. You said that you knew all about the death of Li. I heard you. I could cause your arrest for murder. And, if you don't answer a question that I've come to ask you, I'll swear out that warrant."

The purple one's mouth flew open. "Who are you? A changeling? A Fox Spirit that can inhabit different bodies at will?"

"Never mind who I am," Tsang answered grimly. "I am here to learn whether you caused the disappearance of Laura Sun, either last night or this morning. And I want the truth!"

Waung's face portrayed surprise. "Laura Sun? Your leading woman? I know nothing about her."

"But you know about Li's death. Isn't

it reasonable to assume that you also know of Laura Sun's disappearance?"

Waung gave the detective a shame-faced look. "But I don't really know of his death. My theory is that he died at his own instigation—hired some one to kill him. That last night he was alive, he confessed to me that he was full of bitterness over the way O'Conner was running the film. Li said that when the film was released, his reputation would be ruined forever. He confessed that he was filled with great envy of me. Men have died for less."

Tsang gave an exasperated groan. "So that's what you were mouthing about, was it? I should have known that you were too much in love with your vain, peacock self to be either a murderer or abductor." He pointed toward the studio door. "Go back to your preening. And sponge from your mind this interview with me. If your tongue grows loose in the middle, even with wine, I shall hear of it."

The purple one, now thoroughly cowed, fairly bolted away.

Tsang turned to Rutherford, who had been standing impatiently waiting while this colloquy in an unknown tongue had continued. The detective said gloomily:

"Nothing there. I think perhaps this other company steal Miss Sun to spoil our picture. But, no."

"Did you take the word of that lanky specimen you just talked to? Of course, he'd say no."

"But there are ways and ways of saying no. That man is not guilty."

"Well," Rutherford's voice was gruff, "come on, then. Let's play out the farce. Only, when you get tired of walking me around, you see to it that we find Miss Sun!"

An expression not unlike pity flitted across Tsang's carefully made-up features. Offering no reply to the young camera

man, the detective set out at a pace remarkable for a man of such short stature.

10

TSANG'S morning was a series of blanks. Rutherford stalked at his side, glowering and sarcastic, hiding—as Tsang knew—a very sharp fear for the life of Laura Sun under the mask of bad temper. The pistol, however, was put away. Tsang's air of earnestness, the thorough way in which he combed the Native City, had its effect upon the camera man. In spite of himself, Tsang was forcing Rutherford to believe that the search was a genuine one.

At noon, Tsang turned to investigate the various boat colonies. It was not, however, until midafternoon that he came upon his first clue. . . . He had been conversing with the Headman of the junks at Zaucadoo. Here, the banks of Soochow Creek were lined with junks waiting to lighter into the harbor the bales of thread from near-by silk filature mills. The grizzled-haired Headman displayed the usual Oriental disinclination to run his nose into trouble, but Tsang soon discovered, from his evasions, that the man was in possession of an uncomfortable secret.

"What have you to fear, Elder Brother?" Tsang urged. "The police will protect you. And, too, although you are presumably a man of great wealth, even you will not be averse to gaining the reward that is being offered." Here Tsang decided to pledge Lluellan to the payment of a reward.

The man of "great wealth" stared intently at his shabby, coolie-cloth gown. He swallowed. "What—what is the sum offered?"

Seeing the Headman rise to the bait, Tsang said promptly: "Five hundred Yuan dollars."

A glint came into the man's eyes, but he said in an indifferent voice. "It is very little. If the police would consider the risk I run and raise the sum to a thousand——"

"Ey-yah!" answered Tsang testily. "You are like the man who was, by mistake, given a bag of rice yet who complained because he was not also offered a charcoal brazier to cook it. I shall recommend that the reward be reduced to three hundred——"

"Rest your tongue, Heaven-born!" interposed the Headman in alarm. "Five hundred was the sum clicked upon the abacus of my memory. . . . And now, will you follow me? I shall take you to the junk into which I saw a Chinese woman carried last night."

The junkman beckoned to Tsang and Rutherford to follow. Almost out to midstream the boats stretched, gunwale to gunwale. Using them as a bridge, at moments callously stepping on a hand or an arm of a figure napping on their decks, the Headman moved toward the open channel.

"Are we at last on the trail of something?" Rutherford asked wearily. Tsang's pace had been killing that day, and he had not stopped for noontide rice.

The detective nodded, then lifted an admonitory finger to his mouth.

Silently the three approached a large junk on the outermost fringe. It appeared deserted. No crew members took a siesta on the after deck. The forward deck was roofed over with gayly colored matting and hid from view any possible occupants there or down in the cockpit. The lines of the boat indicated speed rather than carrying capacity.

Tsang paused a moment, frowning, a hand on the arm of the Headman. There was something ominous in the silence of that junk. Were men waiting behind that wall of gay matting, ready to spring

out upon him? Or to fire a volley from a battery of small arms? Then he shrugged away the thought. When came his time to taste the waters of the Yellow Springs, no volition of his could change the hour.

The Headman apparently had no such fears. Nimble for one of his age he leaped aboard the strange junk. Thrusting a leathery brown neck under the hood, he muttered a surprised: "Ey-yah!"

"What's up?" demanded Tsang, who was prevented from staring within by the junkman's back.

"The woman is gone! No one is here!"

Rutherford caught the astonishment on the junkman's face, and Tsang's look of perturbation. "Another mare's-nest, Ch'ung? I'm getting pretty tired of this! Either you take me to Laura Sun in the next hour, or I give you a fine fat beating! Just because you're allowed to win a few set-up fights before the camera, you needn't think that you're a champion. I've knocked you down once today, and I'm in the mood to do it again."

Tsang stared preoccupiedly at Rutherford, not even hearing the camera man's threats. "She is gone. But that's not all. Look in this cabin." The detective pointed to a row of neatly piled tins.

Rutherford reached down and opened one. A faint but sickly-sweet odor arose. He gave an amazed whistle. "I know that smell! I used to get it from Li's clothes—mornings after he had been hitting the pipe. But these tins are all empty!"

"Yes. This was the boat that brought the opium down-river from the Honan poppy fields, I think," Tsang answered. "It's been transferred——"

He broke off, for Rutherford was staring at him fixedly.

"Ch'ung, your English is improving, I see!"

Tsang muttered under his breath at his

own stupidity, then he answered bluffly: "That, I think, is my business. Let me also say that I grow little weary of repeated threatenings. I have the realizations that you are worried man. But even patient snail becomes filled with anger when kicked."

"Oh, is that so! And don't stand there and tell me what is your business and what isn't!" Rutherford's snapping nerves caused him to forget all caution. His hand went out in an impulsive, stinging cuff that landed across Tsang's mouth, cutting the upper lip.

The Chinese detective did not move. His eyes bored levelly into Rutherford's—like the thrusts of a steel auger, biting deep. The camera man's eyes dropped. He whispered:

"I—I'm sorry I did that. I apologize."

Abruptly Tsang turned away. Facing the Headman, he said: "It is true that this boat is now empty, but it does not show signs of being abandoned. See, there is rice in the iron pot. And tobacco. Whoever was here will come back. The impetuous and bad-mannered foreign barbarian with me and I will wait here, aboard this junk. We shall hide in the cockpit. You will return to your own boat. As you go, command the men on the junks surrounding us not to give any warning. If they do, I shall cause some wholesale arrests and imprisonment. And you, Elder Brother, will not only lose your reward but will join your people in prison."

The Headman clicked soothingly with his tongue. "Have no fear, Eminent Police Watchdog; no one will warn the owners of this junk. They have no confederates among my people. Each boat here is as familiar to me as the face of my eldest grandson."

"Good-bye," answered Tsang. "If I do not come ashore—if you see this junk bearing off with me aboard—go at once

to the nearest police station. Report there that Tsang Ah-bou, an unworthy and stupid detective, was murdered in the performance of his duty."

11

AN HOUR elapsed. Once Rutherford spoke, but Tsang frowned him to silence. At last the Chinese raised a hand. Both men leaned forward. Clearly there came the bark of a motor launch moving up the stream. Made reckless by impatience, Rutherford asked:

"Have you any hope that Laura may be aboard that boat?"

Tsang answered patiently: "Possibly, my friend. Forgive my saying it, but she is only one—what is word?—segment of pattern that I begin to see."

"You mean, you've a hunch about it all?"

"Precisely," answered Tsang. "A hunch."

As the motor launch drew nearer and gave evidence that it was heading for the junk in which the two men were hiding, they presented a study in contrasting races. Tsang sat on his haunches, rocking gently back and forth. His eyes were alert, but he did not so much as move his head when the launch bumped alongside the junk. Rutherford, on the other hand, peered eagerly through a small hole in the straw matting. He moistened his lips repeatedly with his tongue and his hands clenched and unclenched. His eyes, however, were as unflawed by fear as Tsang's.

Suddenly Rutherford gave a sharp exclamation and, before Tsang could stop him, had bounded from under the matting and out on deck.

"What the devil," he shouted, "is the meaning of this?"

Standing on the bow of the launch was O'Conner. The director stared at Rutherford

in amazement. Then, as though with an effort, he spoke:

"Why, hel-lo, Noel! Didn't expect to see *you* here! What luck have you had? Any trace of her yet?"

"But, Terence, what are you doing here?"

"What do you suppose! I'm on the same trail as you. One of the extras at the studio gave me a tip to try this junk colony. Where's Ch'ung? Have you kept in touch with him?"

"He's here," the camera man answered dully. It was plain that Rutherford had lost interest, now that Tsang's hunch was apparently proving valueless.

Tsang ambled up from the cockpit, a grin stretched across his face. His eye roved casually to the motor launch alongside. There were two Chinese sailors aboard it. The launch, long and powerful-looking, had a cabin, the wooden shutters of which were drawn shut.

Rutherford began to give O'Conner an account of his search. The director listened sympathetically. Tsang waited a space, then leaped lightly aboard the deck of the launch. O'Conner wheeled about, face suddenly grown black with anger.

"Hi! You, Ch'ung! Come away from there! *Buabo*—no good!"

Tsang smiled in reply and shook his head as though not comprehending. Registering idle curiosity more perfectly than he had ever been able to do before the camera, he walked toward the cabin. O'Conner shot out a command in English to the pair of Chinese sailors on the launch, both powerfully built men. Swiftly they sprang for Tsang.

But the detective was prepared for this. There took place a fight that made Rutherford's mouth water to film. Here was no faking, no elaborate toppling over of a combatant in defeat at the precise moment that a scene had run its required

length. The odds against Tsang were two to one, the combined weight of the two sailors was more than double his; yet he appeared capable of meeting the handicap. As he adroitly shifted and dodged, the sailors got into each other's way.

After a space of this *mêlée*, Tsang bent down and caught one of the men in a wrestler's grip, gave a grunt and heave and lifted the sailor over his head. The man fell with a crash, his skull striking against the low brass rail of the launch. The force of the impact bent the rail and apparently cracked the sailor's head, for he lay still. His fellow promptly drew up and then cringed away from Tsang. O'Conner, from the junk, shouted at the frightened Chinese:

"Go on, you! Get into it! You've only begun to fight!"

But the man continued to cringe away from Tsang. O'Conner took a quick step to the edge of the junk, preparing to leap aboard the launch. Tsang said sharply:

"Mr. Rutherford, stop him! Keep him there!"

Automatically the camera man held out a detaining arm. But the director shook off his grasp, muttering:

"Don't be a fool, Noel! Can't you see what Ch'ung's trying to do? Make away with my launch!"

"Sorry, Terence," Rutherford muttered, drawing away his arm. "I didn't think of that."

Unimpeded, O'Conner jumped aboard the launch and swung a doubled fist viciously. Tsang ducked. The director was twenty pounds heavier than the Chinese detective and, as was soon evident, a superb boxer. The detective fought hard, if awkwardly, taking buffets on face and shoulders that caused Rutherford to wonder why he did not go crashing down.

Then the sailor who had funk'd a

single-handed encounter with Tsang crept around behind the cabin, and set himself to dive at the detective's legs.

This was too much for Rutherford. O'Conner might be right; Ch'ung might be planning to steal the launch; but he, Rutherford, couldn't stand to see a man—making as gallant a fight as the stocky Chinese was doing—beset by treachery. Leaning forward from the deck of the junk, steadying himself with one hand against the cabin roof-pole, he just managed to grasp the crouching sailor by the collar of a coolie-cloth jacket. Giving a hearty yank, Rutherford pulled the man backward and aboard the junk. The sailor gave a strangled, rattling sound and sat down abruptly on the deck of the junk, feeling gingerly at his neck. He remained seated, prudently refraining from further combat.

O'Conner was slowly driving Tsang to the rail, his heavy fists, filled with dangerous power, moving like pistons. Tsang's lips were ribbons. One eye was fast closing. A cut on his cheek had caused a bit of the clay pigmentation to hang loosely—as though a great patch of skin had peeled.

Yet, in spite of the beating he was receiving, Tsang kept his wits. Here, he realized, was a man who must have been, sometime in his career, a professional prize-fighter. O'Conner handled himself too perfectly even for the finest of amateurs. By trying to box O'Conner, Tsang knew that he was playing into the director's hands; but at wrestling the detective feared no man. . . . Suddenly cowering back as though beaten, he tolled O'Conner on. With a snarl, the director leaped in, to give the knockout. Tsang dropped to his knees, turned his shoulder, ducked in his head, and O'Conner dove helplessly over him, to the deck.

The fall did not even stun the director, but it gave Tsang the opportunity that

O'Conner's dangerous, flying fists had previously denied. The detective's legs shot out in a scissors hold; the ankles locked together squarely about O'Conner's waist.

The director thrashed fruitlessly about for a moment, then lay breathing in great gulps, too winded for words. Tsang, who was breathing as easily as though this were part of his daily regime—as in part it was, since he had taken over the rôle of stunt actor—now called to Rutherford:

"Come aboard this launch, my friend. Make looking in its cabin."

O'Conner also spoke to the camera man: "Yes, for God's sake, Noel, come aboard and make this devil loosen this lock he has on me—I can't move! Every time I try, he tightens it!"

Rutherford sprang across the narrow space of water to the deck of the launch. He moved determinedly, mouth grim, toward Tsang. The Chinese detective looked up appealingly:

"Break my hold on this man if you will, my friend—but first make looking down in this cabin!"

After an uncertain moment, Rutherford obeyed Tsang's behest. His scrutiny was short. He straightened up and muttered:

"Only tins of film. Queer that they should be here. Why did you want me to look?"

Tsang frowned. "Go down into the cabin. You've not looked closely enough!"

O'Conner spoke: "So you've begun talking English have you?"

Tsang paid no heed; his eyes were on the camera man. He could see Rutherford's shoulders stoop lower and lower. Suddenly the American gave a sharp, wordless exclamation and disappeared in the cabin. There came the sound of voices: Rutherford's, furiously angry, yet

tender, too; and in reply, a woman's accents.

O'Conner's face dropped into curiously rigid lines, like nothing so much as a cold, gray mask of ungarnished papier-maché. He ceased to struggle against the grip about his ribs.

Laura Sun and Rutherford emerged from the cabin. He was still engaged in untying strands of rope that had been fastened about her hands. Her mouth was sharply abraded and flecked with blood where a gag had evidently been thrust with considerable brutality.

"Now, Terence, what is the meaning of this?" began Rutherford in the still tones of a man who has been barely able to master a very vital anger. "No lies! I'd advise you to tell me, before I lay my hands on you and choke the life out of you——"

"Wait a moment, my young friend," interrupted Tsang. "Please! Such threatenings are most highly illegal. And I must now disclose myself: I am humble watchdog of the law. You will allow me to take caring of justice!"

"What do you mean?" muttered Rutherford.

"I mean that I am lowly detective."

O'Conner groaned. "Oh, Lord, a Chinese dick! And to think that I was taken in by him!"

Tsang answered: "But think how I was almost taken in by you. I thought you were motion picture director."

"Well, I am, and a damned good one! I turned down twenty thousand a year in Hollywood, to come out here. I can prove that!"

"I do not have least doubt of it," agreed Tsang. "I should have said: I thought you were only motion picture man. But you are more, much more——"

"What on earth do you mean, Ch'ung?" Rutherford demanded.

"I know what he means," spoke up

Laura Sun. "I followed O'Conner all the way across the Pacific to verify a suspicion. And I proved I was right."

12

NO MORE was said for the moment. Rutherford, aided by Tsang, bound O'Conner with the same ropes that had been used on the wrists and ankles of Laura Sun. The brace of Chinese sailors—taking advantage of the preoccupation of the foreigners—silently made their way ashore. One of them was holding a head upon which a large bump had risen; the other was still feeling gingerly at the vertebræ of his neck.

About the launch a veritable sea of excited faces had risen. Every junk at Zaucadoo was filled with peering Orientals. Loudly rose their speculations. Why had the small but apparently powerful Chinese bound with ropes one of the foreign devils? And why had another foreign devil stood complacently by and permitted it? Strange were the ways of the Occidental barbarians—but pleasing to note that not always were the Western Ocean men invincible.

Laura Sun rubbed at her wrist and said almost sharply to Tsang:

"Of course, if I had known you were working on this same job, think of the time we could have saved and the risk! I've had a pretty bad morning of it! O'Conner found out that I knew something and he tried to gouge it out of me, today!"

Tsang gave her a puzzled look. "You are very youthful to be a man-hunter!"

She smiled faintly. "I know. It's one of my assets. It stood me in good stead, getting this motion picture job. But to be made leading woman was a little more than I bargained for. Poor O'Conner, struggling with a couple of amateur ac-

tors, both of us! But what I haven't learned yet is the way he smuggles the stuff."

"What stuff?" asked Rutherford, conscious that he was several steps behind the others here. Laura, a detective; Ch'ung, also one.

"Opium," she answered. "We were sure that he was the head of the ring, but we were never able to learn his method of handling the Black Seed."

A chuckle came from the bound man at their feet. "You'll never know."

"Deeply regret taking away your last ray of hope, honorable director," Tsang said, "but I do know."

He walked to the cabin of the launch, bent over and came upright again, with a flat-sided, circular tin in his hands.

Rutherford laughed. "Don't be silly, Ch'ung! That's a film container!"

"It *was* film container. Now"—Tsang wrenched it open—"now you see, it holds several hundred dollars' worth of *ab-pien*."

On the clear warm air rose almost overpoweringly the sickish-sweet odor of opium, neatly packed balls of Patna, Red and Black Skin, each ball wrapped in foil. Laura Sun spoke crisply:

"These were probably going to America. Shanghai is the assembling-place for Burmese and Indian opium, as well as the local Szechuan seed. These containers were to be sent over—along with bona fide film. The method is clear to me now."

"Precisely," said Tsang. "It was nice system. If the customs in America opened one of the film containers and found opium, O'Conner could claim not to know anything of it. With it would be several reels of film showing me agilely falling on my head from Lung Hwa Pagoda into net."

Rutherford now interposed: "But how

can O'Conner afford to smuggle opium? He has a reputation in Hollywood of being an A-Number-one director, commanding thousands of dollars——"

At their feet a chuckle arose, dry, sardonic.

Tsang promptly motioned Rutherford and Miss Sun to leave the launch and go aboard the junk, where they could be within view of O'Conner but out of his hearing.

"It is true that he can command thousand' of dollar', possibly, as director. But as head of opium ring, he can make many million. He gambled for very great riches, indeed."

Rutherford spoke, giving Tsang a quick glance: "You have another solution, too. Any man gambling for as many millions as that, wouldn't hesitate to commit murder."

Tsang's eyes fell levelly on the young camera man's. Rutherford's gaze dropped. He muttered:

"I—I guess I won't accuse him of murdering Li. I imagine he will have enough indicuments against him to hold him in prison for the rest of his life. Why not let sleeping dogs lie?"

"No!" Tsang's monosyllable shot out with the sharpness of a whip-crack. "A watch-dog is not a sleeping dog, and I have said that I am watch-dog."

He turned to Laura Sun. "Why did you kill Mr. Li?"

13

LAURA SUN blanched perceptibly under the olive bloom of her skin. Rutherford ripped out a sharp oath and fumbled in his pocket. Tsang's hand went out swiftly and he caught the camera man's wrist. The pistol that Rutherford had bought the day before tinkled to the deck.

The Chinese girl thrust herself between

the two. "Noel! Please! We must have no more bloodshed. This man is only doing his duty. He has found me out; that's all. You did your best to shield me. You even tried to take the blame on your shoulders." She fell silent.

Tsang eyed her keenly and tried to erase from his face all signs of elation. He had made a shot in the dark, accusing her. Yet it had seemed logical enough. O'Conner, of course, might have done it, but he would have run a risk, with the fortunes of the whole opium ring resting on his shoulder. Rutherford was out of the picture, but it had been his attitude of trying to shield Laura Sun that had pointed Tsang's suspicions toward her. Tsang said quietly:

"Suppose you tell us your story, Miss Sun?"

She said promptly and earnestly: "Yes, I'll tell it, if you promise to believe me. For every word I say will be the truth."

Tsang nodded.

"First off, the only person to suspect me was Li. It was my fault that he did. I tried to pump him, to worm out of him his connection with O'Conner—outside, that is, of his motion picture affiliation. I was certain that O'Conner and Li were in league together in the opium smuggling. Li couldn't exactly place me—he never did realize that I was a detective—but he became frightened. He tried to drive me off the lot. He would just about have done it, if it hadn't been for you, Noel. You took my part and upset most of Li's little plans.

"Li must have taken his suspicions to O'Conner. If so, the director didn't believe him, for O'Conner never once showed that he suspected the double rôle I was trying to play. O'Conner was satisfied with my acting; it was more American style than Li's even if it was amateurish.

"Then came the morning of Li's—

death. I had gone to the studio early. The day before, a boat had come in with mail from America, and I wanted to see if any letters had come for O'Conner that might give me a clue. I was going over these when I became conscious of some one behind me. I turned around. Li was there. He made a jump for me, hands spread like a fan. I dared not call for help. He caught my arms and muttered that he was going to hold me there until O'Conner came.

"My eye roved along the desk and I spotted an onyx paperweight. A clumsy weapon, but the only thing I could see. Just then I heard O'Conner's voice—from quite a distance. Li's grasp on my arms relaxed. He turned toward the door, to hail O'Conner. I caught up the paperweight and brought it down—on his head. . . ."

Her voice faltered and her brown eyes became filled with horror at the remembered vision. Then her gaze sought Tsang's again.

"You see, I am telling you the truth. I could have said that I killed him in self-defense. But that would not be correct. He was not threatening my life, except indirectly. But this I will say: I struck only with the intention of freeing myself, not with any thought of murder. Please believe that, Mr. Ch'ung!"

"Tsang Ah-bou is my unworthy name," spoke up the detective absently. His brown hands drummed a quick tattoo on the matted roof of the junk. "Ey-yah!" he muttered. "Ey-yah!"

Laura Sun gave him a hopeless look. "Well, I suppose you will want to arrest me, Mr. Tsang? But can't you leave Mr. Rutherford out of it? It is true that he came in and saw me, staring at Li, with that ghastly onyx ball in my hands, but he was only trying to help me. He, at least, has done nothing."

Tsang knitted his eyebrows. "Done nothing? Miss Sun, he is an accessory after the fact. As a detective, even a lady detective, you know unpleasant meaning of that term: that he is guilty, as though he aided in crime." He was silent a moment. "And if I solemnly turn away my eyes, I, too, become an accessory."

Laura Sun gasped. "You mean——?"

"I mean," said Tsang smiling gently, "that I shall announce to my Chief, Lluellan, that the mystery of Mr. Li's death is un-soluble. True, it will be my first big failure and will cause Lluellan, *Lao-yeh*, to think very small-ly of me. But that is penalty I must pay for joining ranks of law-breakers." Tsang took a deep breath and then added irritably: "It all comes, I think, of the bad custom in United States of having lady detectives!"