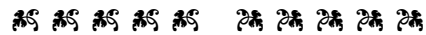


# **The Sinister Dr Wong**

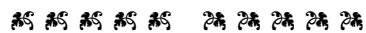
**by Robert Wallace,**

**Published: 1933**



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# Chapter I

## Blood is Shed.

John Bracket, head of the United States Secret Service, was about to speak. When Bracket spoke, men listened. And when he called a group of his star operatives into the big sound-proof room that was his sub-rosa chamber, there was something mighty important in the wind.

Rolling his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, Bracket studied the faces of the men seated before him, his own eyes grave with the concern of the knowledge he had just gained. „Gentlemen,“ he said crisply, removing the cigar from between his teeth, „I have to tell you a bit of very disturbing news.“ Here he paused for a single, impressive instant, while he observed that every eye in the room was fixed on his face. Then—„Doctor Wong is back!“

For a moment following his announcement the men gathered before him made no reply, uttered no sound. Then slowly, gradually, they turned their faces, one toward another, lips parted as if to bite off some lurid oath, eyes narrowed grimly.

So the dirty fox of a heathen was back, eh? And what was he after this time?

Bracket did not keep them waiting long. When he had satisfied himself that his announcement had sunk in firmly, that the full import of his words had struck home with all the force that the wily Oriental's name deserved, he continued.

„Every man of us here,“ he stated now, „is familiar with Wong's reputation. We have dealt with him before and he can set a tough pace for the best of us. But this time we will get him, and get him right. The man is making himself a power among his people in this country and has now reached a stage where he constitutes the greatest menace to the peace and safety not only of this nation—but to the entire world.“

The attentive operatives nodded grimly. The Chinese, as they still remembered, was a ruthless fiend—cruel, resourceful, with a brain as keen and clever as the best among the government's highest officials. But Bracket was still to disclose alarming facts.

„Within the past week,“ continued the Secret Service chief, „two of this country's greatest scientists have disappeared. This, of course, would be only two citizens under ordinary circumstances; two professional Americans among our millions. But—these gentlemen happen to be something more. They were experts associated with the Bureau of War Gas and Investigation, and they have disappeared. The combination of facts connected with the complete vanishing of these gentlemen, together with information which I have at hand, prompt me to confess to you here in utmost secrecy that Doctor Wong is behind the case.“

The chief paused for a moment and glanced toward one of the men in the audience, then added:

„Wong either has these two scientists or—he has disposed of them. I don't have to suggest to you what their fate has likely been. However, we have among

us here one man who is equipped to deal with Wong. Most of you know who I refer to, for this man has been in at the kill on more than one case in which Orientals have figured with this department. Will you rise for a moment, Mr. Graham?"

Richard Graham, or Dick, as he was known to his fellow operatives, stood up, slightly embarrassed, and nodded to his chief. He was a tall man, perhaps five feet eleven inches in height, with a noticeably erect figure, square shoulders and a slim but well-knit body. His face was tanned almost to the hue of a native of the flowery kingdom, but it was his eyes that dominated the picture he presented. They were grey eyes, and when he looked at you they gave you a feeling of seriousness.

"Mr. Graham," explained Chief Bracket, "is, as some of you know, the son of a missionary to China. He was born there and spent his early youth among the natives of many provinces. Graham speaks, or is familiar with, most of the leading Chinese dialects. And I have decided to assign him to this job of running down Doctor Wong."

Dick Graham nodded again, thoughtfully, and resumed his chair while a score of his associates cast envious glances in his direction. There was no question in their minds about the judgment of John Bracket in assigning Graham to this job.

Dick was one of the aces of the service; had been for seven years. True, he had been born in China, and had started out as a student of Chinese customs and lore. He was the logical choice for the work, and as far as his courage and ability were concerned—well, that was beyond question. Graham was one of the nerviest men who ever carried the government authority into the realm of organized crime.

"When do I start, Chief?" inquired Graham now, as he noted that Bracket seemed to have finished and was frowning at the hot end of his cigar. "I'd like to move out on this right away."

Bracket looked up, rubbed his smooth-shaven chin with the capable fingers of one big hand, and nodded to his interrogator.

"Whenever you're ready, Graham," he agreed. "I merely called the boys together here so everybody would be informed. In case anything happened, you know. They'll know what you're on. You've made your arrangements already, I suppose?"

Dick Graham got up promptly, declared that he had, and without further ceremony, or even a handshake, walked to the door and went out.

Every man left in that room behind him knew that Dick Graham would either "get" the infamous Doctor Wong, or—go down in the smoke.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fog enveloped the night in a cloak of dully grey gloom. The street lamps shone like pale gobs of phosphorus through the misty veil that hung in draped festoons, swirling fitfully in the drafts that whispered about the dirty corners where streets that were alleys tangled with one another in the heart of the city's Chinatown.

Soft-slippered feet shuffled amid the drifting, ghostly fog like the padding of velvet-sheathed claws of jungle beasts hunting the night for prey. Under the spell of the dreary gloom there seemed to stalk at large the very spirit of some evil monster; some hissing, many-headed dragon whose giant body lurked

behind, secure in its darkened den, where the bones of its victims crunched beneath its horny saber-shod claws.

Chinatown!

Tonight it pulsed with the very throb of the evil power that crouched beneath its mantle of serenity, for a great force had come to take possession of the quarter, a force masterful enough to command, to move a finger at which the yellow horde would cringe and bow low to the earth. Doctor Wong!

Wedged snugly between two dirty, ill-smelling tenements, where the lodgers were crowded like vermin in foul, dark dungeon rooms, stood a bleak-fronted building that had one day been the home of a merchant prince. Rusting elaborate fire-escapes clung like rotting skeletons to its front. The windows, streaked and crusted with the dirt of years, stared like the sightless eyes of a blind man into the thickening fog. There was no outward sign of life about the building; no sound filtered from the windows and the door.

Yet here was hidden Doctor Wong.

Back of these musty, dank walls he had established his headquarters, and here he waited, like a spider squatting in a web.

And along the Chinatown street a figure shuffled. Nearer and nearer to this house it came like a fluttering phantom, until, at last, with furtive glances behind through the mist it darted into the solemn, darker shadow that was the doorway.

A yellow, wiry hand snaked out from beneath the voluminous folds of a huge sleeve and one long thin finger moved unerringly to a signal bell hidden cleverly in the pattern of the wall.

Quickly and without a word the caller stepped inside. To the casual passerby this house was a forlorn, drab face of brick with dead eyes. Inside—a palace. As the muffled visitor shuffled along the hall, his slippered feet deep in the soft luxury of priceless Oriental rugs, his slant eyes glittered in full appreciation of the richness of the furnishings, the gorgeous beauty of the hangings, the splendor of the polished teakwood and ivory.

The man in the great hall breathed a prayer to his ancestors as he halted before a portal of polished ebony.

Once again his finger was pressed to an electric button, a signal bell fixed cleverly in the eye of a dragon whose sinuous body glittered with jewels.

This time, from somewhere beyond, in the depths of the building there was heard the resonant clang of a brass gong. The huge panel of ebony slid silently into the wall, revealing a broad, sumptuous chamber into which the visitor stepped.

One step he took, a single move that carried him across the groove where the massive ebony panel slid, and here he halted while the door itself closed swiftly behind him.

„Greetings, most high-born prince, from the humble slave Ho Lee,“ bowed the newcomer, his tone filled with reverence, his body almost doubled in his salutation.

From a dais at the far end of the room, a handsomely gowned yellow man stared at his guest with eyes that were motionless. Like a figure carved from ivory and yellowed with age it gazed down from a veritable throne, stiffly, emotionless; while on either side of him stood six towering giants, armed with heavy Oriental two-handed swords, their only sign of life a slow blinking of beady black eyes.

Ho Lee waited with proper respect for the majestic figure on the throne to reply, to recognize him. It was like waiting in a tomb for a mummy to arise from a sarcophagus. He heard the breathing of the huge guards flanking the figure on the throne, and saw that their bodies were stripped to the waist, smooth and hairless in the soft light that seemed to sift through the room from nowhere.

But his eyes could not remain long from the imposing occupant of the throne. Ho Lee, expressionless, immovable, saw the eyes of the other yellow man. They were hungry eyes, lustful, set in a tight-skinned mask of parchment shade, behind which a fiend might have watched, seeking his chance to kill, to reek a bitter hatred on all of the world.

Then Ho Lee saw a finger move and his eyes were drawn to the hands. They were slim as a woman's with long tapering fingers that might have been the steel-sharp claws of a tiger. And yet these fingers were graceful; the beauty of the gem-studded rings that adorned them swept away all suggestion of force, of the surging power that smoldered in the man's eyes, until one let his gaze rest on the hideous nails which were protected by jeweled guards.

Ho Lee saw but he did not tremble. It was not good for one to tremble within sight of—but lo, silence. The lips of the man on the dais were about to move. „Ho Lee,“ the lips intoned. „You have come, and it is well. You bring me the word as I wish it? Speak!“ Shuffling forward three steps nearer, Ho Lee prostrated himself, and rising, began in a sing-song:

„Ahn Wong—the celestial born—the king of kings! This miserable slave cherishes the honor of serving. He comes to report that Ahn Wong's well-conceived plans are carried out. The guards will be at the house of the infidel Raynor at midnight. All is well.“

Wong stared at Ho Lee, and his slant eyes narrowed until they were slits that blended with the crow's feet in his polished skin.

„Ho Lee is wrong,“ snarled Wong, leaning a trifle forward on his perch, his rich satin garments rustling with the movement. „All is not well, my slave!“

Lee lifted his suddenly frightened eyes to those of his master. What he saw there caused a chill to clutch at his heart. His bland face lengthened in a terrified start.

„But master,“ he pleaded. „What is it that I have done. I only—“

„Hold your tongue! You know what you have done. You administered the potion of the living death to the infidel, Naylor, did you not? Confess this to me. Speak!“

Ho Lee cringed. He seemed hypnotized by the dominating stare of Ahn Wong, who shouted:

„Answer me, you fool with the eyes of a fish. Confess!“

Ho Lee fought with his throat, tore at it with his hands, slid his parched tongue over his lips.

„Yes, master,“ he managed to blurt, „but—“

„Enough!“ thundered Ahn Wong, his wrath giving him the look of a demon aflame. „He is dead. You gave him too much. Our friend Naylor was a most valuable—yea, priceless plaything—alive. He is nothing dead. Your stupidity has cost me the price of the earth's ransom. And you—will feel the same death!“

A cry of terror escaped Ho Lee's dry lips. Ahn Wong drew a deep breath. The tortures of seven devils made Ho Lee writhe in agony at the fate that had been spoken for him. He threw out his hands in suppliance, pleading with his

clutching fingers, his staring eyes and his speechless but moving lips. The same death!

Ahn Wong was unmoved. The block of yellow marble that was his head, turned toward the giant guards at his left side. Wong's snake-eyes fastened on the leader.

„You have heard me,“ Wong's words were scarcely whispers. „He dies the same death. Take him!“

Like great trained beasts the huge half naked guards strode forward, jerked the inert body of Ho Lee from the floor. The sudden clutch of powerful hands snapped Lee into semi-consciousness, a scream struggled from his lips, and a big hand was slapped over his mouth. Ahn Wong's slave was doomed.

Then came a lifted sword, flashing in the softened lights like the under-wing of a vulture in the blazing sun. Strong hands gripped the helpless Ho Lee while the cruel knife point of the blade was jabbed deep into his arm.

Ahn Wong watched silently, his metallic eyes alight with a fiendish pleasure, as another guard produced a vial and bit out the stopper. A liquid of the same color as the fingers that poured it splashed over the wound.

Drop. Drop. Drop.

Blood and poison. Swift and deadly the potion did its work. The man held in the viselike grip of the mammoth guards jerked, stiffened. His eyes visible above the monster's hand that was clasped across his mouth, bulged in agony.

„Fool,“ grunted Ahn Wong, with a grin that was his first facial expression.

Blood dripped from the wound to the richly hued rug beneath him. Ho Lee tried to struggle once more, spasmodically. His face and body began to change color. Spots of rusty ochre spread around his eyes, appeared on his throat. His eyes grew dull, lusterless. A tremor convulsed his whole frame. And then he went limp.

The guard whose hand had been clamped on Ho Lee's mouth stepped away and bowed low to Ahn Wong. He made no sound, but the man above him on the dais motioned with one jeweled finger.

„Take him away,“ he ordered.

As the Manchu giants carried the limp corpse off, Ahn Wong mumbled softly to himself. It was well. Blood had been shed this night. But this was only a moistening of the finger tips to the gory trail he planned for his triumphal march to the throne of the world. Blood would run in rivers, but Ahn Wong was destined to flood the earth in a sea of crimson.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Yellow Hand Strikes.**

Steel nerves are essential to a man who goes up against the cold steel. Some of his fellow operatives of the Secret Service claimed that Dick Graham had no nerves at all. On the other hand, Graham himself admitted to nerves; he was just as human as the next fellow.

But an almost constant association with danger over a period of years had hardened Graham against the risks his duty made him face. At the same time the stalwart young operative was aware of the closeness with which he walked

beside Death. It was the chances he took that thrilled him. This Ahn Wong case now was going to try the mettle of a real man.

„You see, Professor,“ Graham was discussing the situation for the third time in as many days, „this Doctor Wong is no ordinary criminal by any stretch of the imagination. He’s some sort of a mad genius who is determined to acquire a power over the whole world. Has a monarchial complex. He—“

Professor Raynor interrupted with a shake of the head.

„Really, Graham,“ he argued, „all this elaborate precaution strikes me as entirely unnecessary. There’s no reason for anyone to harm me. If your friend Doctor Wong wanted to offer me a little fortune for my invention, it was his privilege. Just as it was mine to refuse him if I chose, I’m just a simple inventor. No one would bother about me.“

Graham, however, was not to be denied. He was under orders from Headquarters in Washington, and he could not afford to leave any loopholes for the plotting Oriental.

„My dear Professor,“ he insisted emphatically, but with the proper attitude of respect for the venerable scientist. „You have just perfected the invention of a gas which you claim—and have proved in your laboratory tests—could destroy the entire world. Do you not realize that there are men who would murder in order to obtain the secret of this gas?“

Professor Raynor shrugged and stroked his beard.

„If this fiend Wong could get the secret of this gas into his possession,“ continued Graham, „his mad desire for world dominance would be within his reach. Don’t you see? And further—what about Naylor and Ralston? Does anyone know where they are; what happened to them? Do you? No!

„Well, I’ll tell you what we think, what the Department has every reason to believe. Doctor Wong has got Naylor and Ralston. They may be alive or they may be dead, but you can take my word for it. Wong wormed their secrets from them, or slaughtered them in some torture chamber in an effort to draw it from them. And you’ll be next. Unless—“

„Ridiculous,“ snorted the professor stubbornly. „My friends are working secretly. They have gone into seclusion. The idea of your placing all of these men here is simply preposterous. The guard you speak of from the War Department is ample—quite ample.“

Graham savagely bit off the end of a cigar and flung his gaze about the room. Striking a match he applied it to the end of his cigar and puffed a moment, thoughtfully.

Professor Raynor was a hard old fellow to handle. Well, there was consolation in the knowledge that outside that door stood a half-dozen of Graham’s men. In the street, too, there were six more rough and ready fellows keeping a strict vigil.

The scientist sat back in a comfortable arm chair and shoved an ash tray toward Graham. The secret service operative, nodded, and the silence was unbroken except for the ticking of a tiny desk clock. Both men had relapsed into their own thoughts. Graham looked at the clock now and began figuring mentally.

By midnight the War Department men would arrive from Washington. They would take back with them a small case containing a canister of Raynor’s new poisonous gas; the only sample extant of this powerful lethal vapor.

„It's nearly time,“ mused Graham, comparing the time of the desk clock with that of his own wrist watch. „Once we turn this can over to the G boys we can stop worrying.“

„I never worry,“ chuckled the professor. „The things I've searched for in my life have generally been years away. One always reaches them in time.“

„It isn't the worry,“ corrected Graham. „I don't mean that exactly; but the responsibility. I'm anxious to get rid of that thing.“ He pointed to the innocent looking, specially made metal can-shaped thing on the desk. There was undoubtedly enough of the deadly gas in that sealed container to wipe out the millions that filled the crowded city. „Once the G-men have got it, it will be pretty safe. But they haven't got it yet. I wonder what's delaying them?“

As he spoke he raised his head quickly. Both men could hear the sound of feet in the hall outside. There were voices, too.

Then, as if in answer to Graham's question, the door was pushed open and two of his own men entered, escorting a quartet of strangers.

O'Leary, one of Graham's right-hand men, saluted.

„The men from Washington, sir,“ he announced, as the door was closed behind them.

Dick Graham nodded to the newcomers and Professor Raynor arose from his chair to reach over for the precious canister. There was a cheery smile on his face as he turned to the Secret Service operative.

„You see,“ he said. „It was just as I told you. No trouble. Everything is quite regular. Where is the danger you have been hinting at?“

The four from Washington moved to the desk, and one extended a small slip of paper, like a label, toward the professor. Graham peered across the desk at this, and chewed his cigar. He was trying to place these men in his catalogue of faces. If they were men from Washington, he should know them readily.

„We'll want you to sign this, Professor,“ declared the man with the label. „Have to paste it on the can to identify it as the original for records, just sign—here. Yes, sir.“

Raynor took the paper.

Leaning over the desk, he picked up a pen which lay on a blotter there and with a queer twinge of his facial muscles, began to write his name. Then, as if he had been stabbed to the heart, he broke out with an odd cry, dropped the pen and stared in bewilderment and horror at his fingers.

In that instant Graham was beside him, looking at the same thing they all saw. Blood was on Professor Raynor's thumb and index finger. Terror sprang into the scientist's eyes and he glared horrified about him, gasping. Graham swore explosively, reached quickly for the fallen pen, and froze.

Nobody but Graham seemed to realize what had happened, for none moved. Graham stared now at the pen, its handle near the writing end, still sticky. And in the stickiness there glittered the fine particles of sprinkled glass chips. They were there on the blotter, too, where the pen had been lying when Raynor picked it up.

„What have I—?“ The scientist tried to call out. He staggered and collapsed, falling backward into the chair from which he had but a moment ago risen.

The Secret Service operative snatched up Raynor's wrist and felt of the pulse. He looked up, startled, for the aged body was pulseless now.

„What the hell!“ O'Leary broke in. „What's it mean, Dick?“



„Get an ambulance!“ cried Graham, excitedly. It was no time for conjecture. It was a case for swift action. „A doctor! Quick, for God’s sake!“

With an oath, O’Leary sprang to the telephone. The others stared blankly from Graham to the inert body of Professor Raynor. O’Leary was shouting angrily into the receiver, demanding immediate service, then swung around to reach for the pen where it lay on the desk.

„Damn funny,“ he declared, frowning, making a move to pick up the thing.

„Don’t touch it, you fool!“ warned Graham, knocking O’Leary’s hand away roughly. „You’ll die. Don’t you get it, yet? Somebody dusted that stuff on the pen while it was lying there. Quick now, step outside and see if anybody’s been seen hangin’ around here. Someone’s been in this house.“

O’Leary followed orders quietly, swiftly, and returned with a baffled look. Graham shook his head.

„I never guess,“ declared the interne, then: „What do you want to do about him? It’s Professor Raynor, isn’t it?“

Graham frowned. „Yes, and you’d better just—“

„Maybe,“ offered the man in white, „we could rush him over to the hospital and try—“

„Do it,“ Graham broke in desperately. „Get him over there as fast as you can. Hurry. We may be able to save him. I can’t understand how he could go so quickly.“

The driver and the interne wasted no more words, but swiftly placed the body of Professor Raynor on a stretcher and carried him out of the house.

As the door closed on them, Graham’s gaze turned to the four men by the desk, the four from Washington.

„What about us, now?“ demanded the fellow who was evidently the leader. „We came for this can of---whatever it is. I’ll just take this now and we’ll be going.“

„Wait,“ ordered Graham. „Just hold your horses. I’ll make a little call first. This case is getting hot.“

Picking up the telephone he listened for a moment, puzzled. No, the wire was not dead, but it was certainly odd. Somebody’s voice was on the line. A man’s voice.

„Who the devil is this?“ demanded the Secret Service man gruffly.

A chuckle answered him, and from the other end came a calm „What number are you calling?“

„Get off this wire!“ shouted Graham. „This is an emergency call and I’m in a hurry.“

„Don’t make me laugh, Richard Graham,“ taunted the voice, and suddenly Graham realized.

Something about the accent, the tone of the speaker at the other end. A fierce fighting rage gripped his brain and he clutched the instrument with fingers that threatened to crush it to splinters.

„You are very unfortunate in your connections, Mr. Graham. This wire was cut in early in the evening. You can speak only to me—to the potential prince of the earth.“

„Wong,“ snarled Graham, „you yellow devil! You’re a liar. We just put through an ambulance call from here.“ Laughter followed this—a hearty, cruel, crackling laugh.

„My ambulance, Mr. Ace of the Secret Service,“ explained Doctor Wong. „I had to have the professor. And I've got him. I am certainly grateful to you for offering no resistance. My plans are working—“

„Your plans,“ snapped Graham into the mouthpiece, „are shot to hell. You got Professor Raynor, yes; but we have the can of gas. So what good will the man's body do you?“

„Just a moment, my friend,“ purred Doctor Wong in a voice that was smooth as satin. „You say you have the gas. I am certain that if you raise your eyes and look to your right, you will change your mind about the gas. Ahn Wong times his plans to the flutter of an eyelid.“

Dick Graham unconsciously followed the suggestion of the Chinese at the other end of the wire.

There before him, arms elevated high above their heads, stood O'Leary and his comrade, grim, silent and still amazed. The four men who had „come from Washington“ were in complete control of everything.

Big, businesslike automatics were pressed into the kidneys of Graham's two guards. A third mysterious gentleman was covering Dick himself, a yawning black muzzle aimed at his heart. The fourth fellow, evidently in charge of the party, stood with feet spread, one hand hooked into a sagging pocket, the other toying with a vicious-looking bulldog pistol.

Before Graham could move or utter a word, this gentleman, with a step nearer, spoke.

„We'll start somethin' any time you say, fella. All we're after is this little can here, and I don't guess you muggs'll give us much of an argument. Will yuh?“

Graham, his body rigid, glanced from one to another. It looked like a burying detail.

They were a tough, reckless looking quartet and a move by Graham or O'Leary or Marquiss would start bullets flying.

## **Chapter III**

### **A Tryst with Death.**

Pushed literally to the wall, Dick Graham's brain was filled with a panic of raging thought. With a flash came the realization that he had been smoothly tricked by Doctor Wong and these men of his. These were no G-men; they were the hired thugs of the Oriental devil himself, gunmen who had either waylaid the real government guards and murdered them, or turned them off on some ruse.

Powerless now, Graham faced his captors, tensed for the chance he hoped might present itself. O'Leary and Marquiss, he knew, would stand by him in any pinch, and they could make a real fight of it if—

That was the catch. Graham's eyes searched for an opening and as he glanced about he wondered. Had it been one of these very four here who was responsible for that poisoned glass powder? And if so, how had it been accomplished?

Grimly silent, he cursed himself for the slip that made him now actually a prisoner. What was going to happen?

The leader of the quartet did not keep him in suspense. With a motion of his weapon, this fellow spoke.

„If any one o'you fellas try to yell out,“ he began his threat, „or you make a break for the door—blooey! Yuh get it. See? So far the muggs yuh got outside ain't heard a thing, an' if yuh wanna die right here now, try and let 'em know how we gotcha jammed.“

„Hold on,“ sneered Graham angrily. „I never welched for a rat like you—“ He had sprung like a terrier at the leader, reaching for the weapon, and smashing out with his clenched fist, when the other shouted.

Crash! Every man of the four brought his gun down with a smash on one of the three. Graham was struck front and rear, and felt himself crumpling under the double thunder of the blows.

O'Leary and Marquiss, too, went careening drunkenly, to sprawl face down on the floor.

Graham tried desperately to clutch at his adversaries, but the power of those gun smashes was too much. He was dazed, and struggled to lift his face and shout. With a smothered curse, one of the gang was upon him, engulfing his parted lips in a hard broad palm, and stifling the cry for help.

Collapsing in a heap on the floor, Dick Graham felt himself slide off into unconsciousness, but like a man who struggles in the grip of some wild dream, he was vaguely aware of rushing feet, and the voice of one of his enemies.

„Fast now, fellas,“ ordered the leader, grabbing the canister of gas. „Come on. Up the old fire-escape. Wun So has got the guys on the roof all peaceful by now.“

Without a sound the four vanished through a window. It was as if they had been swept away on a magic carpet. There was not even an echo of the carnage or the escape. Only the little clock on the desk ticked on, its impassive face fixed on the mysterious, deadly pen.

Professor Raynor was gone. The hired assassins of Doctor Wong were gone. Dick Graham and his double guard lay in tiny pools of blood where they had fallen. Had Death claimed these also in the ruthless path of the dreaded Chinese madman?

\* \* \* \* \*

And so it was night again. Darkness lay like a dirty blanket over the crowded section of the city known as Chinatown. There were few lights glowing in the grimy windows along the streets. In a doorway, here, there, a still figure leaned, motionless, garbed in somber black.

A Bowery bum, ragged and footsore, shuffled wearily along Mott Street from the Square.

Now he paused as he came to the corner of Pell Street.

Here was as good a place as any to rest himself, and with this decision he edged back against the tiny stoop that was the entrance to the sordid tenements above the stores.

Dick Graham felt as dirty as he looked, but under the mask of grime and paint, under the disguise that made him one of a thousand human wrecks that float with the tides of the city's underworld, he was as confident as ever, and determined to get the yellow fiend who called himself the prince of the earth.

Standing there out of the path of a dim light in the nearby store, Graham reflected bitterly. He had looked in at the door of Death. He and his

companions, O'Leary and Marquiss, had faced the grim reaper and were still alive. That had been a narrow escape, a lucky break for them.

„Damn him!“ mumbled Graham, as he remembered the affair in Professor Raynor's study and the close shave the three of them had when the scientist met his death.

As soon as the Secret Service operative was patched up and marked for duty, he had rushed back to pick up the trail. There was that ambulance matter. Graham set promptly about tracking down that odd business, and he was at last able to learn that, upon the night in question, an ambulance had also clanged its way through Pell Street. Two friendly tramps had seen it and Graham had pumped them cautiously for information.

„No," the speaker of the pair had said. „We didn't watch it where it went. Ambulances ain't nothin' new to us. Are dey, Joe? But we saw it comin' back, pal, 'bout ten, fi'teen minutes a'ter.“

„Pell Street, huh," repeated the inquiring bum.

„Sure," the man agreed. „We seen it turn in dere. But how could we tell yuh where it wuz goin'?"

„Swell, pal, swell," chirped the curious bum who looked not at all like Dick Graham of the Secret Service. „Well, s'long, pals.“

The tip, however, had availed Graham nothing. He had tramped the streets hour after hour. Perhaps the wily Wong was even watching him then, for all he knew. Well, he was an easy target for a Chinatown slug, and he had to play the game as he started it.

Somewhere in this labyrinth the Evil One, as he had come to think of Wong, was hidden safe, secure. The thought made him uncomfortable, itchy, and he pushed off from his lounging place and started along the street once more.

Chinatown seemed just coming to life. There were more people about him. Figures passed him, slowly, swiftly, like so many shadows. Here the glare from a shop window lighted a cruel grinning heathen face; there a bloated, pot-bellied denizen of some dungeon, once a white man, now a sodden wreck that cheated Potter's Field with every hour he breathed.

There were women, too; dark, sad-eyed creatures who strutted boldly, almost savagely among the figures on the streets, dodging the barrels and open cellars, flaunting their painted faces in the fluttering shadows, like bats that float with the night wind in search of prey.

Suddenly Graham halted in the middle of this whirl of black, white, yellow and grey. The passersby sped back and forth; yellow men, white and black. But Dick Graham saw none of these now, for his eyes were staring at a girl.

„Here?" he moved his lips in awe. What was such a creature doing in this vile breeding-ground of the gutter whelps? She was beautiful, and her clothes were rich.

He could not help but stare at her, and then he felt a second start, for she was staring straight at him. As he caught the direct gaze of her eyes he saw her blink and look away.

But she continued toward him, unswervingly. In another moment she was close, almost touching him. He tingled with the fragrance of her perfume. Then her voice awoke him with a shock. For it was harsh, mechanical, like a phonograph.

„You seek the Doctor Wong?" was what she said.

It was a question. Did he look for Doctor Ahn Wong? What did it all mean? How could she know that he was there for that very purpose? But the girl was gone. He could follow her with his eyes, as she sifted in and out through the crowds, winding a trail along the narrow street.

Graham made up his mind swiftly. If it was a trap he would have to take his chances. He wanted, more than anything else in the world, to come up with Wong. If this girl could lead him to the crafty Chinese—why not? Moving after her, Graham began to gain on her. Soon he was at her shoulder.

„All right, girly,“ he whispered close to her ear. „You lead the way to Doctor Wong.“

„If you are alone,“ she replied in the same drab, mechanical voice, „follow me. If you try to play any tricks, your life is not worth—that dead cat there in the gutter.“

Dick Graham gritted his teeth, and kept walking at a pace that permitted him to see the girl's profile and one eye. She was certainly a beautiful thing, but on second glance he was now as certain that there was that about her eyes which gave him a strange feeling. They were cold, expressionless and might have belonged in a plaster casting for all the life that shone in them.

Something about her manner, her bearing, made him feel that this girl was not a conscious tool of the Oriental master criminal. Fear seemed to guide her every step, her slightest motion of the head.

In his pocket Graham felt with reassurance the bulge of the pistol he carried there. A .38 police special. The girl continued through the night, crossing streets, down one block, around a corner, and on.

At last they came to a dark dilapidated house. He was aware that she had halted and turned in; saw her finger press an almost invisible button.

Taking a deep breath, he watched the door open, and in another moment he and the girl were across the threshold.

At once the Secret Service agent knew he had walked too swiftly into the dark. As the door shut behind them the place went black as a pit. Graham drew his gun and froze.

„What's this mean?“ he demanded of the girl, who, he felt as he touched her arm, was now trembling with uncontrollable fear.

She was unable to reply, and the man from Washington could hear the sob that broke from her lips. He raised his pistol, finger snug on the trigger. There was something about the atmosphere in the place that made his blood chill.

Somebody was near him, somebody besides the mysterious woman. He wished now that he had a flashlight.

„Ah!“

The voice came at him from behind, and he was about to swing and shoot when, like a period dotting the single word, he felt something on the back of his neck.

His blood ran cold. His body tensed. It was the razor-keen edge of a hatchetman's tool of his trade. Gently as the caress of silken scarf it was pressed against his neck. A single move would be the end.

„So you looked for Doctor Wong?“ laughed a voice behind him. „And you found him! Now, my foolish infidel friend, you will find death without looking further. Stand still. Do not move!“

## Chapter IV

### The Devil's Courtroom.

Chinese tapestries crowded with dragons and other mythical monsters richly embroidered in red and gold, covered the walls of the big chamber. Row after row of low teakwood benches were arranged to reach from wall to wall, the full width of the big hall-like room, and stretched from the rear end almost to the edge of the dais at the front.

On these benches, packed tight like caterpillars in the branches of a tree, sat Chinese. Row upon row of gleaming yellow faces, countless golden moons shining in the mellow radiance of light reflected by the mingled silks and satins, the polished brass and magnificent jade. A slice of old Canton set down in the crowded quarter of a great metropolis in the United States.

Resplendent in the gorgeous robes of a prince of the Ming Dynasty, Doctor Wong sat majestically on the dais. The beady eyes swept back and forth over the throng seated out there before him and there was triumph in his eyes as he recognized the reverence in the worshipful stare of these stupid countrymen of his.

Five hundred of them sat there, waiting, paying him homage with their awed silence, and already they were pledged to the sacred cause of this self-ordained king of the „new empire.“

This was the Chinese fiend's court; his palace where death and plunder were plotted. And before the dais stood a white man: an American.

It was Dick Graham. Bound hand and foot, he stood, half leaning against a pillar which rose from the floor to meet the teakwood beams of the high vaulted ceiling.

In grim contemplation of the scene around him, the Secret Service agent bided his time, making plans and discarding them as futile. Again and again his eyes returned to the coffinlike chest of ebony that stood in solitary splendor close to the side of Wong's miniature throne.

The chest was richly inlaid with purest ivory and aged perhaps by centuries in its native land beyond the seas. From the chest, Graham would let his eyes rove to the inscrutable face of Doctor Wong, then to the white woman who stood servilely at Wong's side.

Further, too, he could see more: two white men. They lay beyond the edge of the dais, also bound hand and foot. But they were apparently bound in addition by some mysterious potion that had dulled their senses. Occasionally they would stir feebly, as if struggling for freedom, then relax and grow still.

„Wonder what the connection is?“ mused Graham as he glanced from the white girl to the yellow man.

What made the Secret Service operative most enraged was the servile attitude of the white girl toward the yellow devil. Well, he'd come to that all in good time—if he lived to get out of this dive. What a fool he had been to risk his chance with that girl! Looking for Wong. And all the while the cunning Chinese had had him followed, knew his every move; was just waiting for the psychological moment to snare him in his death trap.

What was that?

Graham roused himself at the sound of a gong. Deep and ominous its note boomed from somewhere as if muffled by soft draperies. A low rumbling murmur rose from the huddled Chinese, grew louder, swelling almost to a thundering din.

The American saw Wong's face light up with cruel scheming as he listened. Then, with a sweeping gesture of his jeweled hand, Wong rose majestically, and faced his audience.

From the assembled Chinese a great roar of approval answered Ahn Wong, and the inspired doctor turned on Dick Graham.

„I am holding court, infidel,“ he announced. „The future emperor of the world holds court to condemn the fools who would oppose me, and to reward those who are loyal.“

Graham did not speak. He was working desperately, slyly, showing no slightest sign of his struggle, to free his wrists of his bonds.

Even now how could he know but that one of the audience had observed his efforts to slip the rope? One hand was almost clear. He kept his eyes on Doctor Wong who continued, addressing his countrymen:

„My courageous servants,“ began Wong in a dialect of southern China, „we are on the threshold of great treasure. Follow my banner and we shall exterminate the white race from this earth. Obey me and I promise you the riches of the world. Oppose me and you are marked for death. At my side you see two of these infidels. They shall give us the key to the gates we march through. Their brains possess great weapons. One will give us a gun which can destroy cities a thousand miles away; the other furnishes us in two moons. We will deal with these dogs shortly.

„But first we pronounce two sentences of death.“ Wong paused here and glared around, his eyes resting on Dick Graham. „One is for temerity in daring to meddle in the affairs of the Ahn Wong. The second is for treachery. This infidel, here, will be first.“ All eyes were fixed on Graham. Then Wong pointed his bespangled finger beyond. „There stands Ah Sin, whose crime is treachery!“

Graham saw a yellow giant who stood some distance to his left, clad in silken trousers. A gleaming knife was thrust through his brocaded belt. The man looked as if he had been struck by a stab of lightning. Blood faded from his lips and his eyes stared in terror. The muscles of his arms and hands flexed in spasms and sweat oozed down his muscular torso.

„Did you think to act without my knowledge?“ demanded Wong of the horrified Chinese. „Your duty was to slay a traitor—Wun Foo. You failed. And for that you die!“

„But, Most High Prince,“ he pleaded, „Wun Foo is my blood brother. I am sworn to friendship with him. He is—“

„My word is supreme,“ he shouted harshly. „Loyalty to the Realm transcends the tong oath. Ah Sin has broken faith and for that he dies. By the fluid of the living death.“

Ah Sin cried in mortal terror as his doom was pronounced and Wong pointed at Graham.

„The death of the white hand,“ he snarled at the white man, „is for you. You die first!“

Wong turned now to the girl at his side.

„Ariadne,“ he intoned in a peculiarly chanting voice, „do you hear me?“

„I hear, O Prince.“

Her voice was hollow and empty, as if it came from far away. It seemed to Graham as if she spoke like an automaton.

„Then you will take this.“ Wong drew a gleaming blade from his belt and placed the hilt in her hand. „Take this,“ he repeated, „and with it tear the life from that white pig who dares to interfere with the plans of the Celestial One.“

## **Chapter V**

### **The Death of the White Hand.**

The girl's dark beauty had suddenly become a thing diabolical. What Graham saw in her face turned his heart to ice. Satan was staring from her eyes. The transformation was horrible. A vampire was creeping slowly toward him.

Tense with excitement, the crowded Chinese sat spellbound, eyes fastened on the moving figure of the girl, the glinting blade in her white hand. It was the magic of their master. Graham, too, was wrapt in the spell of the thing. She was without a doubt, the complete slave of Wong; her every move dominated by his will.

Closer and closer she approached. The knife in her hand was lifting. She was no longer that woman of the street, the strange, half conscious creature who had drawn him like a magnet to this den of crime. Now she was all fiend. She was the Death of the White Hand. The executioner of Doctor Wong.

And while he watched, she closed in gradually, as if she measured each step, each move. The knife was high, its point aimed for his breast. Then swiftly it happened. The flashing knife—

Graham flung himself aside, and a piercing cry arose as his hands were seen to strike out.

„Damn you!“ shouted Graham, hurling himself at the girl,

One hand reached for her knife, the other was flung out to grab her about the middle. But somewhere there was a mistake. Graham found himself struggling like a man in the grip of a gorilla. Stark dismay gripped him as he realized now that he had underestimated the magic of Doctor Wong. His attempt to hurl the woman from him had failed completely.

Slowly, with despair gnawing at his heart, Dick Graham felt his own left arm being relentlessly forced downward. Closer and closer came the knife. Inches separated the point from his body.

Then—the impossible happened.

Ah Sin, prompted by the terrifying knowledge of the tortures of the living death, gained a swift, mad courage. A fierce cry was flung from his throat, and he wheeled upon Doctor Wong. Whipping up his knife he hurled himself toward the dais. Here was the Prince of Hell, alone, unprotected.

Pandemonium broke loose in the glittering palace chamber. Ah Sin was almost upon Wong. The knife sang through the air. With lightning move the wily Wong dodged, and leaped for a button. Click! Like magic the huge chest beside the dais sprang open. A beam of blinding light flashed on from a hidden source and there, blazing in the shaft of silver gleamed the most elaborately jeweled image of Confucius, fairly alive with diamonds and rubies.



„Thank God!“ moaned Graham, snatching up the knife which fell from the limp hand of the girl. „Quick!“

Clutching at her wrist, he leaped away, dragging her with him, straight for the high panels of the outer door. Behind him he could hear the wild shouting of Doctor Wong, a cringing coward himself, but brave in the midst of his foolish slaves.

„Fools! Be quick. The infidel is loose!“

Graham and the girl had gained the door when Wong had managed to shut the glittering idol from view. With a roar that filled the chamber like the thunder of cannon fire the mob of Chinese sprang after the fleeing Secret Service man.

„Hurry,“ panted the girl at his side. „Get me free from this terrible place—and—“

There was no time for surprise at her words. Graham dragged, half flung her suddenly weakened body along toward the door, burst through before the panels could be closed.

He felt the whirring of a hatchet as it whizzed past his head and heard it strike—*spang*—into the brocade-covered wall panel. Before them loomed the door. But between them and that door stood a Chinese giant, bare to the waist and armed with a shining sword.

„Stop them!“ came the voice of Doctor Wong. „By your life’s blood, stop that white pig!“

The sword was raised, and a wild light sprang into the swordsman’s slanting eyes. Graham saw it all in a flash, but did not pause. Instead, he lunged straight for the yellow devil and drove the knife he held deep into the other’s chest. Right to the heart.

„Whew!“ gasped Graham, gathering up the girl as the cool night air struck him full in the face. Only then did he realize that back in that hall a thrown knife blade had gouged into the flesh of his shoulder. Warm sticky blood was coursing down his arm, as up the street he turned and ran, stumbling, cursing angrily at his seeming weakness.

Behind him the maddened Chinese had halted before the doorway. Dared they follow him openly along the thoroughfare? He guessed not, but neither did he dare to slacken his pace, until the girl began to struggle again in his grip.

With a fierce jerk she was on her feet, glaring at him, tugging to break free. Graham fought with her but she was stubborn, defiant.

„Take your hands off me,“ screamed the girl. „I must go back to my master.“

The announcement stunned Graham, and he tried to dissuade her, but she raved and tore at him until she broke free of his grip and turned on her heel to walk dazedly back straight toward the Oriental mob. Graham risking his life, waited, watching. He saw her swallowed up in the chattering crowd.

What was it? What wild craziness had turned her so quickly from a passive white woman to a fighting, determined slave of this yellow master mind of the criminal world? Should he turn back there, too, and charge the yellow men?

„I’d be seven kinds of a damn fool,“ he muttered as he reached a decision. „Nix!“

He could go back later, better equipped. Now he would be only walking to his death, and with no guarantee that he could release the girl from this powerful spell under which Doctor Wong must hold her. Now he was on his way.

Like a madman he raced along the street. A nauseating dizziness was coming over him as he turned a corner and discovered a uniform of familiar blue and brass.

„I'm Graham!“ he managed to stammer out. „Federal agent. Ring alarm and—raid—Wong's house—number—“

Had he been able to tell it all? Graham did not know, for he sprawled inertly forward into the officer's arms.

## Chapter VI

### Cantonese Magic.

Graham, with his arm bandaged and somewhat paler than he was when he started out to get Doctor Wong, sat in a deep armchair and listened with attentive interest. Professor Warren Carruthers, bearded and scholarly of mien, was talking of China and its people, their customs and the legends of the ancient republic. The professor was recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on the subject.

„It is an odd thing, Graham, yes,“ Carruthers was saying. „Very odd. It's something I'd hesitate to discuss with any man who has not seen it himself. However, it is true. Just as the ancient Egyptians possessed secrets of nature such as the embalming process, so do the Chinese know strange things about the action of drugs, certain herbs for instance, upon the human system.

„Our medical profession has been far too much concerned with healing to delve into the mysteries of the black arts. Orientals have mastered what is almost sorcery to a white man's mind. For instance, this girl Ariadne now. I should say she'd been forced to take a drug so rare, so little known to modern science, that we have no name for it. I've never seen it myself, but my research has shown me that it has foundation in fact.“

Graham frowned in astonishment. „You mean you believe she's been taking some drug that completely subjects her to the will of Doctor Wong?“

„Precisely,“ declared Carruthers. „She is robbed of her own will and becomes a ready victim to the hypnotic influence which this yellow man no doubt possesses. Under these spells she becomes a mere tool in his power.“

Dick Graham sat wrapt in thought. The girl was indeed in a perilous position. Doubtless, when the Chinese devil had finished with her, when his uses for her were past, he would toss her like a helpless derelict into the streets.

„What of the drug,“ urged Graham, „they gave to Raynor? It apparently killed him; I'll swear that he had no pulse at all. And his eyes—they turned yellow. To all appearances the man was dead—yet, as we now know, he did not die. How do you explain that, Professor?“

„Your Doctor Wong is a fiend of many talents,“ observed the man of science. „He has great knowledge. Such a drug, and by that I mean a drug producing such effects as you describe, is recorded in the archives of the third Ming Dynasty. Hundreds of years ago. It is there called the Drug of the Living Death. Evidently this fellow Wong has resurrected it from some hitherto unknown records.“

For some time Graham and his friend Professor Carruthers sat in silence, smoking.

From Carruthers he had gathered sufficient information regarding the strange transformation of the girl Ariadne to explain the mysterious actions of the girl during the hectic struggle inside and outside of Doctor Wong's assembly chamber.

„And when we reached the street,“ argued Graham, „she turned on me like a spitfire.“

„Exactly,“ nodded Carruthers. „Wong, you see, was rid of Ah Sin then and he was able to recast his spell over the fleeing girl. It has been done.“

While Graham mulled this over it gave Carruthers a chance to review the scene as Graham had explained it. Suddenly he broke in on the Secret Service agent's dreams.

„I'm curious, Graham,“ confessed the scientist. „You seem to have been impressed with the idea that this fellow, Ah Sin, would surely have slain Doctor Wong, but for this ebony chest or coffin or whatever it was. Tell me, what was in it?“

Graham closed his eyes so that he might better see the chest again, the way he had caught a glimpse of it during his battle in Wong's palace. Little by little he pieced it together and told his companion of the jade idol set with jewels and the snakes winding about it.

„What?“ Carruthers demanded.

Puzzled, Graham repeated his description of the idol.

„By God!“ exclaimed the older man. „He's done it. But it can't be!“

„What?“ demanded the law officer from Washington.

Carruthers became strangely preoccupied. „Please let's not discuss it now,“ he suggested. „I must look up something. This Wong person shall, perhaps, realize his mad dream yet, Graham. But don't ask me any more. Give me a ring in a couple of hours, will you?“

Dick Graham shrugged and got up. „Just as you say. I'll call you about dinner time.“

As he let himself out he noted the figure of a police lieutenant who passed him and approached Carruther's apartment door.

Something odd about that man struck Graham and he was puzzling it over as he disappeared around a corner in the corridor. A moment more and he could hear voices. One was Carruthers' raised in irate altercation with his caller. The police officer protested.

Graham waited grimly. He had a hunch and was going to play it for everything it was worth.

Soon he saw the pair come into view around the corridor corner, Graham was waiting at the elevator door. He glanced up in what looked like surprise.

Or he hoped so.

„Thought you were going to be busy there,“ he greeted Carruthers.

„Me too,“ growled the professor. „Lieutenant Nolan here must have passed you in the hall.“ Graham nodded casually. „He has word from the commissioner who would like to have me sit in on some points of Chinese criminology.“

Graham frowned, glancing from Carruthers to Lieutenant Nolan. The fact that the department wanted to consult the scientist was nothing new or startling.

But why did the commissioner have to send a police lieutenant. Why did he not telephone? Graham wondered as he looked frankly at Nolan, who, incidentally, had uttered no word. Nolan's stolid silence, be it known, was the real cause of Graham's sudden discovery.

A glance from the man's face to his uniform gave Graham an almost visible start.

„Steady there, Lieutenant,“ warned Graham, the service revolver covering Nolan's middle button. „I thought I noted something odd about you. Now, Professor,“ turning to his friend, „if you'll be so good as to go back and dig up that information you promised, I'll take care of Mr. Nolan. But before you leave let me point out,“ the gun muzzle indicated the lieutenant's badge, „that a lieutenant of the Metropolitan police wears a gold badge—not a nickel-plated one.“

Carruthers' eyes widened and he chuckled. His footfalls faded away around the corner. Graham stepped closer to Nolan. „And you, my friend, if you happen ever to see Doctor Wong again, which I doubt right now, tell him to be more careful of his details. Even a Chinese master mind like the dirty Wong can muff one.“

It was but a short while later that Dick Graham was entering police headquarters with Nolan in tow, and covered.

Inspector King was an old acquaintance of Dick Graham's. From behind his desk he recognized the G-man entering, and beckoned to him. The pseudo police officer was hauled up to face the inspector.

„This fellow,“ explained Graham after greeting his friend, „is one of Doctor Wong's gangsters. Will you take a slant at the uniform he's been wearing right here in the city?“

„Cheap,“ commented the inspector in disgust. „The dirty louse.“

„Well, Wong sent this mug up to Warren Carruthers' place to lure the prof away. Must've got wind of the fact that I'm depending on Carruthers for some mighty important dope on his native land. Since we raided the house where he held me in Chinatown and he was gone, the yellow devil has faded entirely. This bum is a lucky break for us, Inspector. He's our only chance to nail Wong.“

„What do you want me to do?“ inquired King, willing to go the limit for his friend Graham.

„I can't get a peep out of him. Make him talk. He's on Wong's payroll and he knows where the chink fiend is.“

King considered this gravely. It was surely no time for dallying.

„Do you want to answer some questions,“ he tried the unwilling prisoner, „or—do you want to answer our questions?“

„If I squeal I die,“ he muttered.

„All rats squeal,“ cut in Graham, his anger rising every moment.

„He'll talk,“ declared Inspector King, decisively. „Sure McCarthy'll talk. I just got yuh, Mac, you dirty mugg. Usin' the name o' Nolan, too. Hey, Lam!“ he called to a heavy-set, red-faced man in plain clothes. „See this lad,“ indicating McCarthy, alias Nolan. „He's got some information we've got to have. Can you get it?“

„Sure thing, Inspector. Come wit' me, mister. Up those stairs.“

Dick Graham watched them climb out of sight and began pacing the floor, explaining meanwhile the difficulties he had faced in his trail of Doctor Wong. Even while he waited now, the rat-eyed Chinese might be preparing his next

move in the weird scheme for world conquest. When he could stand the strain no longer he rushed to one of the Headquarters telephone booths and rang Carruthers' number.

The professor's voice was excited.

„That you, Graham?—Sure. I was right! That's the Cantonese Confucius. This Wong has got it—or rather likely—it's a fake. But with even the fake, he'll rule all China within thirty days.“

„My God!“ groaned Graham. „How?“

„There's some legend,“ continued Warren Carruthers eagerly. „You know the Chinese are very superstitious people. Their lives are lived by their legends of the ancients. There's millions of the ignorant devils in that country who'll fall for it. It seems, listen now—about, well thousands of years ago, Confucius is supposed to have made his own image of jade and diamonds. Supposed to be eternal. Has immortal serpents to guard it. Now, this thing disappeared some way during the Third Dynasty, and it is written that whoever recovers it is destined by the gods of all China's forefathers to rule China.“

„So—“ Dick Graham managed to gasp his thanks, and hanging up with a reminder that he would see Carruthers very soon, turned to see McCarthy, alias Nolan, coming down the iron stairs with his guard.

„He talked,“ nodded the guard belligerently.

„And what did he say?“ urged Graham. They were steering the prisoner toward Inspector King's desk.

„This Doctor Wong guy,“ the guard rumbled along while Graham and King listened, „he sails tonight for China. He's chartered his own ship. This guy here“—indicating the prisoner—„is supposed to meet some coolie at the Warren Street dock and the chink was to take him to Wong. That's where he gets paid off for knocking off your friend Carruthers. Says he don't know what boat it is.“

Graham broke in swiftly.

„Thanks, Inspector. I can go it alone from here. Wouldn't be any sense sending a squad down there. The Chinese would never show us the ship. I'll play it solitary and I'll get on that ship whatever it is. Will you have the Harbor Police ready for action. I'll shoot a rocket from the deck.“

Inspector King frowned.

„It's mighty dangerous business, Dick.“

„Skip it,“ laughed Graham, grimly resolved. „If that chink gets loose with his fanatical dreams—“

## **Chapter VII**

### **The Death Ship.**

Dick Graham sat in the stern of the little dory and watched the impassive coolie with narrowed eyes. It was a dark night, and, fortunately, starless. The water rolled blackly beneath the bow of the craft.

The Secret Service operative was well aware of the risk he was taking, of the dangers he faced. But he was inspired by the knowledge that he had Doctor Wong on the run and that this night would likely result in a clash that would be heard around the world.

The idea of this Chinese madman possessed of the power that his influence over his own race would give him, and secure in the grasp of the two most remarkable inventions in the history of the civilized world, gave Graham an added thrill with his realization of the part he was playing tonight.

Back along the shore the dock lights twinkled. Beyond, over the dark outline of the waterfront glimmered the scattered lights of the great city itself. A metropolis such as this would be but a toy in the hands of Doctor Wong—if he was allowed to flee. And here he was. He'd fooled the stupid Chinese slave and was drawing nearer and nearer to his despised heathen enemy.

Graham wanted to speak, to say something. But he could not talk with this silent Oriental. And now, ahead of them, a blacker bulk in the darkness, loomed the huge hull of some ship. Was this the boat they were rowing for?

„This boat?“ he leaned closer and motioned in the dark. „This Wong's battleship, China boy?“

„Yes,“ answered the yellow man, who was a mere blob in the night. „Boat of Prince Wong.“

This was what Dick Graham was waiting for. The time had come. Sliding his service revolver from his pocket he moved up to the Chinese and shoved the gun into the yellow man's face.

„Good,“ he whispered. „Now, no blabber out of you, mister. Ship those oars, and put your hands up nice.“

Awed by the weapon the yellow man did as he was bid. Graham watched cautiously. One oar came in. The Chinese shrugged resignedly and drew in the other. Then, swiftly, uttering no sound, he swung that long wooden blade.

Graham ducked, felt the oar swish over his head, and he leaped forward to smash the gun barrel down on the coolie's head with an audible crunch. The Chinese slumped soddenly into the bottom of the boat.

Slowly, alertly, Graham sculled the craft through the dark toward the steamer. Feeling his way along he came at last to a rope. And taking a firm hold of it, shoved the rowboat away into the tide. Then, hand over hand, listening as he went, Dick Graham climbed toward the deck. Crouching outside the rail, he halted, tense, but heard no sound.

„Funny,“ he mused, peering into the blackness of the night. „Don't seem to be a soul on deck.“

Assured that this was possible he slid quietly over the rail and touched his feet on the firm deck. Here he crouched again and waited. Well, he was on Doctor Wong's boat anyway.

If he could get to the bridge and shoot a rocket from there he might be able to stand the yellow fiends off until the Harbor Squad arrived. This, then, was his job.

„Here she goes, boys,“ he told himself, and began to creep carefully along the deck. In the shadow of a lifeboat he paused to bring out his rocket pistol. This he examined and found ready for use. He now had the rocket pistol in his left hand and his service revolver in his right. He'd better be careful lest some speck of light find the metal on those weapons and mark him for some watchful eyes. Maybe they had already discovered him and were lying in wait. Well, it was his chance. He had to take it.

It took Graham many minutes of crawling to reach the bridge. There was no sign of life around him yet. His jaw was set in a hard outline as he stared about him. The shooting or the rocket might arouse the whole ship.

„The devil with them,“ decided Graham. „Let the yellow rats come!“

It might be his death warrant, but Dick Graham raised the rocket pistol, aimed it into the black sky and fired. Crack! A weird hiss marked the trail of the rocket as it went soaring upward, up, up into the dark, leaving a trail of whispers and a faint line of its passage that Graham could see for only a flash. Then, pop! it burst high up in the air.

A brilliant crimson flare blossomed aloft and the Secret Service agent flattened himself down in the shadows, watching, alert, ready for whatever broke.

For long moments he sprawled there, listening, watching the fluttering red glare above. The deadly quiet of the boat remained unbroken. No footfall reached his ear. Why? Graham rose and searched about, emboldened by the silence. Creeping back to the deck he began hunting the ship.

Somewhere back down the river there were police on their way to him now. They must be coming. If anything started it was up to him to fight the chattering yellow horde off.

Foot by foot he searched the deck, stalking along like a ghost, on tiptoe, more mystified with each step. Could it be that Wong and his henchmen were all below somewhere, in some private cabin waiting for the set time to sneak out of the big harbor?

The idea sent Graham groping about until he found a companionway leading below. To another deck. Here he took up his hunt again. At times he bumped into bulkheads and the dead ends of alleyways. Then, when he had about decided that he was either on the wrong ship and had been tricked by the coolie, or that Wong and his party had not yet arrived—he heard a soft heathen voice from somewhere ahead of him.

Crawling patiently toward the sound Graham came at last to a skylight. One of the ventilators was open and the Secret Service agent tiptoed to this. Peering over and down, he drew back with a smothered oath.

There in the saloon below, surrounded by a crowd of his yellow henchmen, stood Doctor Wong. Before him, held by a pair of grinning Orientals, was the girl, Ariadne. The would-be prince of the world wore a broad smile, and his eyes gleamed with a strange fanatical light. Close by him stood a half-nude yellow giant bearing a gleaming two-handed sword.

As Graham strained his ear to catch what Wong was saying he managed to get:

„—and she has served us, but not of her own will. But her service is ended; we need her no more. Therefore she must die by the will that has guided her. It is mine!“

A rousing thunder of approval greeted his words and Graham gripped his revolver tighter, and listened as the Oriental murder master continued.

„Her fate is decreed, but she should know this fate and will die without my will to protect her from fear. Death to all white infidels.“ His eyes were fixed on those of the girl now and he spoke in clear, distinct English. „You are free, Ariadne. Go back to your own weak will.“

Horror took hold of Graham as he watched the girl. Her expression changed. Slowly the glazed, dull eyes blinked. The hard, masklike face softened; the rigid tensity of her muscles relaxed.

Bewildered, she stared at Wong, at the yellow horde which surrounded her. Lastly her eyes fell on the gleaming sword, and a shrill, unearthly scream clamored from her throat.

It was more than the white man could stand and with a curse he leaped back from the skylight.

A running jump and he hit the glass feet first, plunging through amid the smash and clatter of the broken skylight. Bedlam broke out below him as he dropped. Thud! Graham scrambled to his feet amid scurrying Orientals who shouted and babbled like maniacs in fright and consternation. Blam! The brute with the sword was the first target for his revolver. The thunder of the shot echoed like a cannon in a tomb.

Right and left he fired, picking his enemies at random. For every cartridge he claimed a dead Chinese and gradually he fought and staggered across the saloon to the girl.

The voice of Wong filled the ship as the yellow beast strove to gather his clan about him, to urge them on to attack the wildly fighting Secret Service man. Even with a gun Graham could never hope to rout this horde, and as he reached the girl, and tried to sweep her up under one arm, he felt the vile grip of yellow hands.

Like the tentacles of a huge octopus the claws of the yellow men fastened on Graham, choking him, binding his arms, smothering him in a deluge of scrambling, floundering bodies. With empty gun, with fist and feet he fought and clubbed, kicking, jerking right and left, fighting more desperately than he had ever fought in his life—for his life.

But he was done for. The odds were too great. He was clamped in hands of steel at last and dragged bodily to where Doctor Wong, calm and confident, stood in judgment.

„You dog of an infidel,“ snarled the Chinese terror. „You come to me for death.“

Dick Graham, panting and bleeding from a score of cuts and scratches, stiff and sore already from the terrific beating this mob had administered, hung in the grip of his captors and said nothing. He only glared defiantly at the grinning Wong. His brain was seething with fear, not alone for himself, but for this unfortunate white girl; fear that this was his last chance, that the police would be too late—or that they had never even seen the signal rocket.

„It is a thousand years since the Cantonese Confucius has tasted of a human sacrifice, my infidel friend. Tonight we shall go back through the centuries to the death of the snakes.“

Wong spoke the words solemnly with all the dignity at his command, then he swung and swept his arms in a wide gesture. His jeweled hand pointed to where Dick Graham could see the ebony chest. That same chest with the inlaid ivory patterns. And in it—the glittering idol with the writhing white snakes.

„Bring the white fool to me,“ concluded Doctor Wong. „Here where we shall watch him feed the guardians of the jade Confucius.“

Unresisting the Secret Service operative was dragged roughly across the ship's saloon.

## Chapter VIII



## **The God That Was Eternal.**

Roaring like a pack of famished wolves, the Chinese crowded about the captured white man. The girl, too, was dragged up close where, as the fiend Wong declared, she might witness the feeding of her beaten rescuer to the reptiles.

Held there like a toy in the powerful grip of many hands Dick Graham, grated his jaws and resolved to put his brain to work quickly. A wild idea had come to him, come like a flash as he remembered Professor Carruthers and the things he had learned from the scientist about the jade idol.

„It's worth a fighting chance,“ mumbled Graham between his battered bleeding lips.

Standing there he saw Doctor Wong's long-nailed finger touch the magic button on the chest. The ebony panel slid back, and there—behold!—a king's ransom in jewels, a nest for the squirming, twisting adders the sight of which brought a terrified scream from the now conscious Ariadne's lips.

It was a ghastly sight. Graham shuddered in spite of himself. And he noted now that the whole ship seemed to have become strangely silent. Even Doctor Wong was motionless. But this was only stagecraft on the crime-mad Oriental's part. His lips moved again.

„Force the infidel's hand in there, Foo Ling,“ ordered Wong pointing toward the sinuous swaying heads of the serpents. „Feed him to the eternal guards of Confucius. Even the poison of this white blood cannot destroy them. Nothing can destroy them. Nothing can destroy the eternal image itself. There is no fire or steel can destroy what the Gods themselves have fashioned with their own hands. Bring him up and deliver him to the eager snakes.“

Here was Graham's moment, his last chance for life. In the very face of death, a death he could smell with the stench of the reptiles, he made his play.

Like a steel spring he tore himself from the grip of his Chinese captors. With a single motion he wrested the huge sword from the headman's grasp and he swung.

Right and left—and left and right—he slashed furiously, driving the yellow mass backward.

Then, with a fierce battle-cry, he turned toward the idol and the serpents.

Swish, slash, crash!

The heavy, gleaming blade screamed through the fetid atmosphere of the steaming bodies. One snake, two, three. Graham worked like a man possessed, grunting with the effort, sweating, slashing heads from the eternal snakes, smashing the phoney idol to smithereens, scattering the cheap paste gems right and left, until the saloon was littered with plaster and paste.

Under the scurrying feet of the yellow men the fake idol and the jewels were crunched into powder. Chinese fell before his swinging scythe, and over it all hovered the fiendish cry of Doctor Wong, fear staring from his eyes, horror driving him backward from the path of the now berserk Secret Service agent.

„Slay him! Slay him!“ bellowed Wong, beside himself. „Kill the infidel who destroys our gods!“

But it was a roar of wrath that sprang from a hundred throats. Egged on by the fear of this prince of evil, the yellow maniacs surged back, gathered,

prepared to charge the white daredevil. And Graham, the dripping blade held ready, faced them.

„Fools!“ he shouted. „You let him trick you. Wong is an impostor. He uses you to gain riches for himself. Is that eternal? Did I not destroy it with this ordinary sword? You poor pigs, to let this mad thief lead you into death without honor. He has played with you like pawns, bowed you down to a thing he pasted together of clay and imitation gems. He is your enemy. He is the enemy of your ancestors, betrayer of your gods!“

Slowly the truth sank home in the tortured brains of his listeners. Knives were raised in menacing hands, and the eyes of the mob swung from the white man to the figure of Doctor Wong.

A coolie touched it off with a shout of righteous rage. He started swiftly toward Wong, knife upraised. And with a rising roar for revenge, he closed in on the Emperor of Death.

It was a good time to retreat and Dick Graham snatched the wilting white girl in his arm and started for the companionway. The snarling, scrambling clash of bodies behind him told the story of the fierce onslaught. Doctor Wong was cornered by his own betrayed race.

As Graham reached the deck and the outer night air, he felt the bumping of smaller boats against the hulk of the steamer. Looking overside he saw the men of the Harbor Police squad coming swiftly up the ship's side. In a flash they were over the rail.

The lieutenant grabbed Graham. „What's happened?“ he demanded hurriedly. „Lord, you're cut all to hell. Where's Wong?“

Graham left the girl with one of the police as guard and led the lieutenant with a group of officers below. From the doorway in the saloon he pointed to the mess. Over in one corner of the long saloon a tangled heap of writhing Orientals fought and clawed, their knives dripping, flashing.

„Wong is finished, I guess,“ said Graham. „He'll be under that heap somewhere, Lieutenant.“

The police officer shot quickly over the crest of the squirming human heap. The bullet smashed into the bulkhead. But its message was plain. There was a swift uniling of the fighting yellow men. Knives clattered to the floor. Hands were upraised in meek surrender. The sight of the sturdy bluecoats, the deadly looking pistols in their fists, calmed the place quickly.

When the mutineers had been backed to the wall and the room cleared Doctor Wong was found lying face down on the carpeted floor. He was a mass of wounds, and blood was spattered all about.

„Dead, huh?“ muttered one of the policemen.

„No,“ grumbled the lieutenant. „Almost. These Chinese are a hard lot to kill, they tell me. Put the irons on him, Mike. We'll take him along.“

Wong was promptly handcuffed. A pair of bracelets were also put on his ankles. Two burly lawmen lugged him away and up to the deck.

When Graham with his police friends and the chattering Chinese were again on the deck, the Secret Service man became aware that there were some strange police signals flashing across the water. Whistles were sounding, back and forth.

It was not long therefore, till another craft slid alongside the ship Doctor Wong had chartered for his world conquest. Over the side came Inspector King with a few more eager cops.

„Hello, Dick,“ greeted the inspector. „And“—he glanced at the girl, seated on a coil of rope—„this the woman in the case, eh? Well, I told you you’d get it. From the looks o’ you, you damn near fed the fish.“

„It wasn’t fish this time, Inspector,“ grinned Graham. „But we had a close call with snakes.“

„What about this girl?“ demanded the police official. „Where does she fit in this?“

Dick Graham looked at her, then at King. The girl was weak, but it was a different girl entirely from the one he had known in his battles with the Chinese devil.

„She don’t fit in at all, Inspector,“ replied Graham. „She was just another one of the madman’s victims.“

„Looks to me as if you were a couple of victims,“ laughed King heartily. „Suppose we get you patched up and write this thing off. Come on.“

„But about Wong,“ added Dick Graham, as the party climbed down into the boats, and the yellow prisoners were herded into another. „I have got a little business with him in Washington, Inspector, and I’d like to see him in a Federal pen.“

„You can have him, Dick,“ agreed the police official, „but I have an idea that when you’ve washed your hands of him in Washington you’ll have enough. If he lives through the night I’ll turn him over to you tomorrow and you can take him along.“

„And if he don’t live,“ chuckled Dick Graham, who had added another star to his record for the Secret Service, „you can have him. If there’s anything I’d have no use for its a dead Chinaman.“

