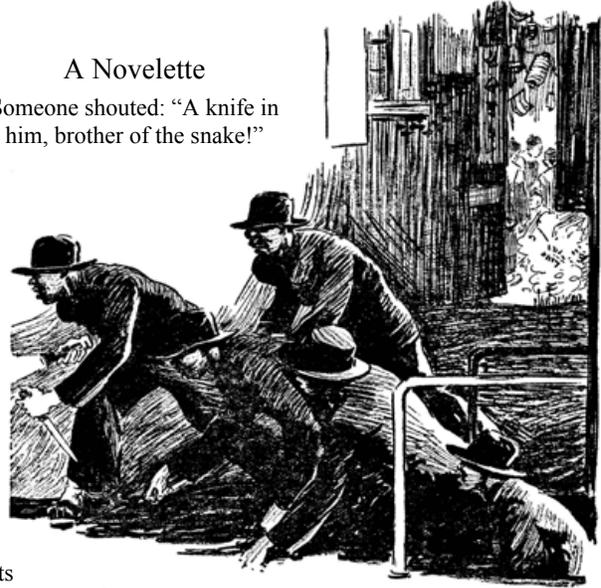


White and Yellow

By Sidney Herschel Small



A Novelette
Someone shouted: "A knife in
him, brother of the snake!"



A half-dozen slinking figures came forward like evil ghosts

In That Wholesale Slaughter of One White Man and Eleven Chinese, Jimmy Wentworth Sensed the Treachery of the Evil Kong Gai

CHAPTER I Gongs and Firecrackers

CHINATOWN was at peace. The hour of the Approaching Year was coming closer with every movement of the hands of the clock on the old cathedral. Long strings of scarlet firecrackers hung from balconies; china lilies bloomed in blue Canton porcelains in every window. The great oiled paper lanterns, yellow and green, waited for the evening, to be lighted.

Soon there would be a great eating of *tche hou'n*—fine fat food additionally greased by perfumed sesame oil. Sucking pigs, stuffed with the dried black meat of Peking ducks, were roasting in the kitchens of the wealthier Chinese. Strange soups, concocted of sugared seaweed and pea tendrils and fish, simmered in the cooking pots of the poor. Squat bottles of rice brandy, all without the stamp of the customs officials, would soon be opened, and the liquid set to warm in the ovens.

Jimmy Wentworth, leaning against the side of the cathedral, marking the southerly boundary of San Francisco's Chinatown, looked down the street with a smile on his lips. All peaceful. All quiet. Children munching coconut-candy. Fathers and grandfathers, their debts for the old year paid, talking in high good humor as they thought of the feast which would follow the fast of the day.

Not even Kong Gai, the Evil One, would dare anything in Chinatown on this eve of the Approaching Year. The most peaceful Chinese would have torn him to shreds. The only untoward thing which might happen would be some suicide; some poor devil of an Oriental who must save his face through death, being unable to meet his obligations.

In some high room a flower girl was singing nasally to the accompaniment of *san-hien*. Wentworth could imagine the girl in her finest silken trousers and jacket as she practiced a song for the evening. He wondered if she had "found her luck"; if the china lily bulbs she had planted in rock and water had bloomed for her during the day. He hoped that they had. Never had he seen such a profusion of the white and yellow blossoms of Heavenly Delight, not even in China itself, where the young detective-sergeant in charge of the Chinatown detail had been born.

The clock struck the hour. Instantly firecrackers began to sputter as the fuses were lit, and then the crack-crack-crack resounded all over the Asiatic district. The old clock's mellow tone was almost obliterated in the terrific din. Wentworth glanced up at the sign beneath it:

Son, Observe the Time
And Flee from Evil.

“Not today,” Jimmy Wentworth thought. “The worst thing I’ve got to do is to eat a million-course dinner tonight, and remember to do it wrong, so the Chinese don’t realize how much I know about their customs.”

At the time of the Newest year even the blue-coated officers of the law were not permitted to go hungry in Chinatown. Wentworth was to attend a dinner given by some of the richest merchants.

The firecrackers sputtered, hissed, crackled, and then, above the increasing racket, Wentworth heard the death shriek of an Asiatic, and saw the Chinese throng become a solid black mass, a block away. Eyes on the milling horde, Wentworth walked swiftly down the street. He did not break into a run, being certain of what he would find—some debtor who had made the only payment possible to save his face. It would be messy, as proven by the scream. A knife drawn from belly to chest.

Although he was watching the mass of Chinese, he saw a man hurrying up the street, toward him. This was not right. Every Chinese should have tried to get as near the dying man as possible, to see if, in his last breath, he acknowledged the debt as honest. Otherwise, the Chinese who should have received payment must present an equal sum, times five, to the temple or his tong. Irrespective of the justice of debts, they must be paid in Chinatown. With gold, or with life.

As the detective, in his guise of beat patrolman, strode along, he saw a form slip into a doorway. He was after the man like a shot, and found a wiry Japanese trying to conceal himself in shadow.

“Where’re you going?” Wentworth demanded.

The Nipponese tried to appear as if he had merely stopped to tie a shoestring. He sucked in his breath politely as he said:

“I go home, please.”

“Why’d you duck out of sight when you saw me?”

“Duck?” giggled the brown man. “Duck is bird. I not un’stand.” He was standing straight now, as he added, “I go home?”

Above the continuous crackling of the firecrackers Wentworth heard a familiar voice, crying in English:

“Officer!”

Dropping his hand to the Japanese’s shoulder, Wentworth turned. He saw Wang Chen-po, his friend, racing toward him, obviously excited.

“I go now?” the Nipponese repeated.

Wentworth retained his grasp.

Wang Chen-po was out of breath.

“Thought you’d be—by the—cathedral,” the young Chinese gasped. “Old Wang Hi’tze—our family—he’s been—shot. And”—his voice suddenly very cold—“you’ve got the murderer!”

Other Chinese were following Wang Chen-po’s course up the street, and their loud, vengeful shouts, involving torture and death, made Wentworth go for his gun. He said grimly:

“Keep ‘em off, Wang.”

“I’ll try,” Wang Chen-po growled.

Wentworth asked his captive:

“Why’d you shoot the Chinaman?”

“I shoot nobody,” the Jap cringed. “I see dead man, yess. I not like. I say, ‘No place Japanese boy here.’ I hurry away, yess.”

The light was none too good in the doorway. The wiry body beneath Wentworth’s left hand seemed to be standing perfectly still, and yet with the quickness of light, while hundreds of enraged Chinese stormed up the street, the Jap’s hands went to the detective’s wrist.

Jimmy felt terrific pain as the Nipponese wrenched at him with expert grip. Even in this agony which numbed his left arm, Wentworth swung, and brought the butt of his gun down on the hard round head of the Jap.

Whether his wrist was broken he did not know. Straddling the fallen form of the Japanese, he snapped:

“When you’ve told ‘em not to try anything, Chen-po, sneak away and call the wagon. Then come back.”

And he had thought there was peace in Chinatown!

MURDEROUS cries rocked up and down the street; black-clad Chinese hemmed the youthful sergeant of detectives against the wall of the doorway. Wentworth kept his gun pointed at the throng.

Above the vengeful voices, above the banging of New Year gongs and the sound of firecrackers, young Wang Chen-po cried:

“The white man has caught him. Justice will be done. Today is the Fortunate Year. We must not kill others—”

An old grandfather shrilled:

“I will tear his eyes out with my nails!”

“He will mount the Thirteen Steps of the

hanging machine," Chen-po shouted. "It is the greatest disgrace."

"Who is he?" a portly merchant bellowed.

"He is not of our country," Chen-po said, in shrill Cantonese.

"A brown one?"

"A brown one," agreed the young Chinese.

Wentworth saw the gleam of knives now. He knew well enough the antagonism between the two races, flaming to fire now because of events on the far side of the Pacific. Just why Wang Hi'tze, rich and influential member of the family of Wang, had been murdered, even if the Jap had done it, was, at this time, of little real importance. Wentworth knew the humor of the crowd. The main thing necessary was to get the unconscious brown man safely inside the Hall of Justice, and worry about the rest after this was accomplished.

So Wentworth shouted, careful to speak in English instead of the Chinese he spoke so well:

"Who saw this man kill old Wang?"

Jimmy knew the Chinese as well as their language. He was not at all surprised when dozens of them perjured themselves without hesitation.

"I saw it!"

"And I!"

"With a gun he killed Wang Hi'tze. Nine bullets are in the dead heart."

"He used a knife! I saw the blade in his hand!"

Wentworth pointed to an old man holding to the hand of a child.

"How about you?" he called loudly. "You, old man! You with the red-paper bundle under your arm. Where were you? Did you see this murder?"

The grandson whispered hastily in the ancient's ear, translating the detective-sergeant's question. The grandfather nodded vigorously, and cried out in Cantonese:

"I? *Hai-ya!* Did I see it? Assuredly I saw it! I will swear to that, by the sacred bones of the Dragon!"

A Chinese grunted. Another muttered a word. His companion, nodding also, began to chuckle. Then someone laughed, and almost at once laughter rippled through the entire gathering.

The old man was stone-blind, as Jimmy knew perfectly well.

"On your way, Chen-po," Wentworth snapped now.

He had correctly gauged the temper of the crowd. They were now willing to leave the matter

in the hands of the police. Several young Chinese even went so far as to carry the body of their dead countryman up where Wentworth stood.

When the wagon from the Hall of Justice roared up Sacramento Street and swung, with tires and siren screaming, into the packed street, Jimmy Wentworth was again leaning against a brick wall, waiting peacefully. At his feet was a dead body. Propped against the wall was the now-conscious Japanese, securely handcuffed. Wang Chen-po, returned, was calmly reciting the first of the Thousand Words of Perfume, as is proper on the eve of the Approaching Year.

"And it is for this ye send in a riot call?" demanded Sergeant Mulcahy. "Did th' firecrackers scare ye, Jimmy?"

Chen-po decided that explanation was necessary.

"One wrong word, and we Chinese would have taken Wentworth's prisoner and cut him up into bits," he said. "Too small for a meal for a sparrow."

"So he talked 'em out of it?" chuckled big Mulcahy. "'Tis Irish ye should have been, Jimmy Wentworth. Irish for talk, and Irish for luck! Here ye are, with th' body and th' murderer both together, and th' business all settled."

"I wonder," said Jimmy Wentworth.

Wang Chen-po bowed to his friend:

"The banquet is at seven," he said, ignoring Wentworth's words. "Until then, may the wisdom of the dragon assist you in determining what caused the death of the honorable Wang Hi'tze."

CHAPTER II

The Slain Aviator

WENTWORTH reported directly to Captain Dunand. He explained briefly what had happened, saying that the report of the gun must have been covered by the banging of the firecrackers. No gun had been found on the Japanese, who said that his name was Matsu Miyamoto, and that he knew nothing whatever of the killing of the Chinese.

"He was beating it from the scene," the gray-haired captain of detectives said, "and that's suspicious. We'll see what we can learn from him again, later, and in the meantime check up on him. His story may be straight."

"I think he did it, chief, but that's not enough. Wang Hi'tze wasn't killed for tong vengeance,"

Wentworth said. "The Wangs are at peace. Therefore, why was he killed? He's a rich man. Or was. He is very patriotic. Which makes me wonder if—"

Laughing, Dunand said:

"Are you bringin' the war across the Pacific, Jimmy? I don't say I'm disagreeing. I'm just glad that for once you haven't got a crime to pin on your friend Kong Gai . . . damn him."

"I can't see where he fits into the picture," Wentworth admitted.

Dunand shrugged.

"It's the wrong way to feel," he said soberly, "but I can't help thinking how much simpler it is when a Chinaman's killed. The newspapers don't care, much. They call it a tong murder, and let it go at that. And—"

The telephone rang. Dunand answered it, listened and said, "I'll be down and look at the body myself."

For a long minute he stared out of the window. Then he looked at the top of his desk. Finally he glanced at his sergeant of detectives.

"Floater," he said shortly.

Jimmy Wentworth said, "Yes, sir. Er . . . Chinese?"

"No. White man. Flower in his buttonhole."

"Suicide?"

"Murder," grunted Dunand. "The flower was a china lily, sergeant."

"I'll go down and look with you," Wentworth suggested. "Although the flower doesn't mean anything to me. They're in lots of gardens now."

"Simpson recognized the man," Dunand said slowly. "From pictures in the paper. It's Harrington, Jimmy. The aviator fellow. Who was going to Shanghai to organize a flight for th' Chinese. It's a mighty lucky break for the department that you caught your Jap, boy. We're sittin' pretty now. But we've got to be mighty careful! This'll be a complicated affair. Perhaps an international case. Let's be mighty careful."

Together, captain and sergeant walked down the corridor, and took the elevator to the basement. The department surgeon, several detectives and officers were waiting in the icy cold white-tiled morgue.

Dunand looked only once at the still, dead face.

"Accidental, suicidal, or homicidal?" he asked of Dr. Nye.

"Possibly any of the three, captain. I wouldn't care to make a positive statement until an autopsy

is performed."

The captain of detectives turned to one of the patrolmen.

"You found the body, Simpson. Where?"

"A longshoreman saw it jammed in the piles of pier 77, sir."

"You were on your beat?"

"I was, sir."

"And saw nothing suspicious?"

"No, captain."

"Umm. Well, he's dead. We know that much. And I agree it looks like Harrington, the aviator. Papers on him?"

Detective Winters nodded.

"Positive identification, captain. Papers, wallet with cards. Body wasn't robbed. Seventy-odd dollars in cash, fountain pen, keys, wristwatch—"

"And china lily," said Jimmy Wentworth.

"In his buttonhole," agreed Winters. "What does that mean, sergeant?"

Wentworth said, "It's a new one on me, if it means anything at all. Harrington may have been in Chinatown, of course, and put the flower in his buttonhole. Everyone in Chinatown knew that money had been collected to send a 'foreign legion' to Shanghai. Aviators. White men, mostly."

"And," went on Dunand, "a Chinaman was murdered a little while ago by a Japanese. Get this straight, men! No talkin' to the papers about that!"

While the officers had been talking, Dr. Nye had been busy. He cleared his throat now, and began to speak:

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is now my opinion that the man Harrington was murdered. In view of—"

Dunand stared at him, and then biting off caustic words, said: "Go on, doctor. I'm listening."

"THE question arose," said Dr. Nye, "as to whether the man was dead or alive before the body was submerged in the water. The external appearances were of no assistance, since no marks of violence were found on the body. There was no froth at the nostrils, indicative of previous death, however. Nevertheless, captain, I am willing to state that Harrington came to his death by . . . er . . . to put it in plain English, he was choked to death! If the body had been in the water a little longer, the purplish marks on his neck—see them—would have disappeared, and a post mortem would have merely confused us. As it is, he was murdered."

"Sure he was murdered," blurted Dunand.

Another detective walked into the chill room.

"I've been checkin' on Harrington," said Detective Haight. "He's ex-Army. Good record. Fine fellow. No bad habits, except a little gamblin' once in a while. So I called this place and that, and it seems that he was in a crap game at the Silver Dollar. That's the place we've been trying to nail for sellin' hop and coke, captain, on Wentworth's tip. The owner of the dive said—"

Haight paused, and looked almost apologetically at the still face of the dead man. Then he continued slowly, "The owner of the Silver Dollar said that Harrington damn' near lost his shirt last night, sir. Said the fellow was taken to the cleaners for . . . thousands."

Dunand snapped, "Meaning that he may've lost what wasn't his, and then jumped into the bay?"

"That's the implication."

Wentworth asked, "Do you trust the Silver Dollar man, Haight?"

"No, sergeant. Not an inch. I'd like to see him doing a ten to life rap. I've gone to him for information before, and this is the first time he was ever willing—anxious, even—to give it."

"Let's get our facts together," the gray-haired captain of detectives said soberly. "A Chinaman is killed up on Dupont. Sergeant Wentworth catches a Japanese trying to sneak away. That's one crime. A white man, an aviator intending to sail for Shanghai, is found by Simpson jammed in the piles of the pier. Doc says he was strangled before he was thrown in the water. That's the second crime.

"Now, if we're intended to believe that Japanese killed Harrington, as they appear to have killed Jimmy's old Chinese, why all the effort to make it appear suicide? Come on, somebody! Let's have a solution!"

All eyes shifted to the lean figure of the young sergeant of detectives.

Jimmy Wentworth said slowly:

"It would seem that the Japanese were attempting to cover up on killing the aviator, captain. Catching the Jap in Chinatown gave us our lead. That's the way it looks, isn't it?"

"In which case," said Dunand, agreeing, "somebody got to the Silver Dollar owner, and made it worth his while to lie, eh? Otherwise he wouldn't admit any gambling going on in his joint."

"He's a snake," grunted Haight.

Jimmy Wentworth's forehead wrinkled at the word, the deadly symbol of Kong Gai. Nevertheless he saw no possible connection between Chinatown's Evil One and this crime, except the remote fact that the owner of the Silver Dollar was suspected of selling drugs—an industry controlled by Kong Gai.

"I'll see what I can find out," Wentworth said at last. "I'm going to an Approaching Year banquet tonight. Maybe I can pick up something. Chinatown'll be talking about the death of Wang Hi'tze. I'll keep my ears open."

"Meaning that you aren't satisfied with your own solution?" Dunand rumbled.

Jimmy Wentworth said:

"Look here, chief! Would you put a china lily flower in your buttonhole?"

"Not me! I can't stand the odor of the things."

"Neither can many white men, sir. So I'll see if I can learn where Harrington was given the flower. Probably it won't do us any good. Probably somebody in Chinatown—someone who made arrangements for the Shanghai expedition—just handed it to him for luck. But it won't hurt to learn, will it?"

"I'll send some of the boys up on the Fillmore beat, sergeant, into the Japanese colony. They may be able to help. Now, the lot of you here forget what's been said, d'ye hear? I'll communicate with the Federal authorities and see what they've got to say. I don't like this mess!"

After the morgue was emptied of officers, Wentworth spoke to the surgeon.

"One thing, doctor," he asked. "The body hadn't been in the water very long, had it?"

"A very short time, sergeant. You can see the clothing. Still gray. Salt water turns fabrics blue. That's why"—grinning—"the newspapers always have floaters wearing 'blue serge suits.' I've often laughed at it."

"Show me the finger marks on the man's neck, please."

WENTWORTH looked at the small purplish places carefully. He said then:

"A man of Harrington's powerful build couldn't be killed by one man squeezing his neck, doctor."

Dr. Nye blinked.

"No," he admitted. "However, there are no other marks of violence, sergeant. No bruises anywhere. A chemical analysis of the clothing might show

unusual dirt in the weave of the fabric, ground in when the man was held against the earth.”

“Not much proof,” Jimmy said, thinking aloud. “Please show me Harrington’s clothing.”

“The officers examined it closely, Sergeant Wentworth.”

“Let me look.”

In the office off of the morgue were the various articles taken from the murdered man. Even the bruised, broken petals of the china lily. Immersed as the flower had been, the Oriental, pungent odor, offensive to many Americans, was still present. In spite of the smiles of the surgeon, Wentworth asked for tongs, and carefully picked apart every petal, peering at the center of the blossom, and then shredding it also. He found nothing at all.

“Think it was poisoned?” Dr. Nye chuckled. “You’ve handled some strange cases in the past, haven’t you?”

Jimmy Wentworth put down the final bit of blossom.

“Just looking,” he said.

Thinking of Wentworth’s reputation, the surgeon said suddenly, “If you wish, sergeant, we can do a complete autopsy.”

Jimmy Wentworth was holding a thin, taut, stiff bit of material in his hand, that he had plucked from the sleeve of the dead man’s coat.

“Not necessary,” he said quietly. “D’you know what this is?”

The surgeon took the quarter-inch thread from Wentworth’s fingers. He twisted it this way and that, and then laughed.

“Jute, isn’t it?”

Wentworth nodded.

“I hope it’s indicative of the sort of material the department will get around the neck of the murderer of this man,” Nye said heartily. “Jute! Well, well! Must have been on the pier somewhere, eh? Part of a shipment of raw jute from India, maybe intended for San Quentin’s jute mill. Where the convicts make sacks. Curious! A strange coincidence. Or does it mean something, sergeant? Was . . . hmm . . . let me think . . . was this crime committed by a convict? I have it! He had a sack stolen from San Quentin, and threw it over the head of Harrington! I can visualize exactly what happened—”

“Sounds fine,” Jimmy Wentworth said, halting the impossible theory of the would-be detective. “Only, doctor, this isn’t Indian jute at all. In the

first place, jute from Calcutta would have been ruined by moisture. That’s why it can only be made into cheap sacks and burlap and poor grade twine. This is Chinese jute. See how stiff and yellow it is. I’ve seen enough of it to recognize this. Never heard of it being imported into the States. No demand. But in China it is used to make exceptionally fine rope. It has a name, doctor,” Wentworth concluded grimly. “Assassin-rope. Murderers use it to bind their victims.”

“You think a Chinaman killed the white man?”

Wentworth, in place of reply, said:

“Have someone look closely, and he find more of the Chinese yellow jute. Then you can determine just how and where Harrington was bound, by the rubbed-off particles of jute. I didn’t think a fellow of the aviator’s courage would go down without a battle, and he didn’t.”

“We’ll do that at once. Shall I inform Captain Dunand of this discovery, or will you?”

“You tell him,” said Jimmy Wentworth. “I’ve got to hurry off and eat a million-course dinner with the Chinese. A number-one first-chop banquet. Birds’ nest soup and all. You tell the captain. And you can tell him, also,” Wentworth added, “that way down deep under this crime we may find a snake.”

“A snake, sergeant?”

“His name is Kong Gai,” said Jimmy Wentworth.

CHAPTER III

The Feast of Four Families

WANG CHEN-PO and his father, Wang Yü, dressed in their finest silks, were waiting when Wentworth arrived. In a corner of the family room incense fumed. Precious old silks hung on the wall, taken from iron-bound camphorwood chests for the festival. In one corner a single china lily bulb sent up its white and yellow blossoms.

Old Wang sat on his teakwood stool, his eyes closed in proper meditation. Young Wang grinned as Wentworth, in new uniform and with shining star, closed the door. Instantly Jimmy’s manner changed. On the street he had been the Chinese district policeman, coming in uniform, as was expected, to a banquet to which American peace officers are invited. But here he was suddenly neither patrolman nor sergeant of detectives, but a young man in the presence of a wise and honorable

elder.

"*Cho san sin sang hola,*" Wentworth said, bowing deeply. "And may your lucky star auspiciously shine, oh honorable Wang Yü."

Old Wang opened his eyes, and then blinked. "Your star," he smiled, "shines brightly today, my son. I thank you for your wishes." It would have been improper for an old man to felicitate a younger.

"He means," laughed Wang Chen-po, "that you dazzle the eye, James."

No mention of the killing of Wang Hi'tze, the head of the family. No sign of sorrow. That, also, would have been improper.

"Are we ready to leave, and enjoy the food brought from the Heavenly Kingdom?" suggested old Wang.

Wentworth knew that there was one chance in a million to startle an answer from the astute old Chinese, and yet it was worth a trial.

"We are ready to walk behind your august person," said Jimmy. "But why was the man who was to have fought for the Chinese army killed?"

Wang Yü blinked once. With his son's aid he came off the stool. Then he fixed his bright eyes on Wentworth, saying, "If you were not my son, and respectful in most things, I would rap you with my fan."

"Didn't work, did it?" Wang Chen-po said in English.

His father promptly brought the hard edge of the fan against Chen-po's cheek. "When you speak in white-man language, I know it is something I should not hear," he said crisply. "I think you were laughing at your brother, and just for that I will tell him what he wishes to know!

"So the white man who flies is dead? Such is the way of the world. Why did he die? Twenty thousand good gold dollars is the reason, my son. That is the amount Wang Hi'tze gave him, to buy this and that. Wang Hi'tze is dead. The white man is dead. So. Let us go and banquet, my sons."

"On the white man's coat," Wentworth began, "was a china lily blossom, oh honorable father—"

"I am very hungry," said Wang Yü.

"On the white man's coat," repeated the sergeant of detectives, "were bits of assassin's rope, where he was bound."

"And thirsty," said Wang Yü.

The old Chinese walked clear to the door, and then said:

"And also old and impolite, my son. An improper question does not demand an improper answer. For once I will depart from custom, and tell you this: I am glad that the white man was murdered, and not a thief. That was the word already in Chinatown. He fought? Yes? I knew he was brave. It is a puzzle, my son, but do not let it interfere with the good food you will soon eat!"

"And don't forget to eat like a white man," suggested Wang Chen-po. "Or everyone'll be wise to you!"

All of which did Jimmy Wentworth no good at all. Did the Japanese kill Wang Hi'tze? Because the Chinese was financing the Shanghai-bound aviators? Were they responsible also for Harrington's death? Or were the two murders unconnected? And what earthly reason had he for trying to hook up Kong Gai with the crime, or crimes, except for the presence of the bits of Chinese jute, and the fact that the owner of the Silver Dollar was supposed to be in the drug ring?

In silence the trio walked along the lantern-lit street. Head high, as if the family of Wang had suffered no sorrow and loss through the death of their leader, old Wang Yü shuffled along with a smile on his thin lips. Wentworth and Chen-po followed, the dutiful three paces in the rear.

Chinatown's shops and bazaars were all closed. Moreover, for the first time in a year Jimmy Wentworth saw no lurking black-clad figures; no hatchetmen, nor 'binders, nor vicious *bo' how doy*—any one of whom would have gladly killed the white aviator for the mere joy of killing. If a 'binder had strangled Harrington, it would have been done by an expert twisting of the jute assassins' rope, not with fingers. That was more a Japanese method of killing. And Wentworth had already learned that there were no sharp indentations near the purplish finger marks on the dead man's throat, as there would have been had a long-nailed Chinese done the strangling.

Again the indication was that the crime must have been committed by the same persons who had planned the death of Wang Hi'tze.

Peace was in Chinatown, although guns rumbled across the sea. Lilies bloomed. Incense swirled high. Debts had been paid. There was peace, but there were two dead men. Why?

JIMMY WENTWORTH was forced to stop thinking as Wang Yü entered the brilliantly

lighted doorway of a brick-faced building, the meeting-place of the Four Families. Here the men of the clan gathered; the men of Wang, Ying, Yee and G'oung. Wentworth recalled Chen-po's sensible warning—that the sergeant of detectives must remember to eat and drink in white-man fashion, lest the Chinese wonder at his knowledge. No handling of chopsticks. No noisy inhalation of wine. No proper sipping of jasmine tea. Nor must he hearken to any Chinese words. The Chinese must consider him only as the district patrolman.

In the great central room of the Four Families tong, hung with silken banners, were long tables spread with Nanking blue linen. Priceless rice bowls of rare Canton were before each blue plate. The chopsticks were of carved ivory. Several white men were already seated at the tables, scattered among the Chinese. There was the head of a bank. The attorney for the Four Families. A friendly South American consul. Several immigration officials. These, like Wentworth, were honored guests.

A Chinese orchestra; two-stringed lute, *sanhien*, flute and round drum, set up a terrible din. Wentworth, alone of the white men present, recognized the famous Song of the Ascending Dragon. To the others it was merely an ear-splitting racket.

At the head of the central table, where Wang Hi'tze should have presided, was a red-painted hand-carved teakwood coffin, lined with crimson silk. In it, within the week, the body of the murdered man would be shipped for burial in the Celestial Kingdom. The gruesome object was not at all incongruous to the Chinese.

One table only was hardly filled at all. Three old Chinese sat there. An Old One from the Ying, Yee and G'oung families. Wang Yü shuffled over to join them. But this still left about ten seats unfilled.

Chen-po and Wentworth sat side by side. *Kan fi*, pure white rice, was heaped in bowls before them. Wentworth immediately reached with a china spoon for some of the food, but Chen-po gently restrained his hand, saying in English:

"Not yet, please. It is not the time."

Knowing this well, Wentworth said:

"Why not? I'm hungry."

"We are not all here," Chen-po explained with a straight face. "See that empty table, sergeant?"

A Chinese mumbled to his table-mate:

"These white men are without manners. They

know nothing. The man of keeping-law is so ignorant that he will probably go ahead questioning Wang Chen-po, and the son of Wang Yü, being courteous, must answer him."

Which was just what Wentworth wanted to do, and what he did safely now.

"Somebody late?" he asked.

Wang Chen-po kept his eyes on his plate, and said, as if reluctantly:

"Yes, sergeant." Under his breath he added, "Officer, I mean. It's O.K. Just looks like flattery, Jim."

Nodding slightly, Jimmy went on:

"Important fellows, are they?"

Chen-po sang out in nasal Cantonese.

"All men are important, oh man without understanding," and, knowing Wentworth understood, said in English, "Not important at all, officer."

An old Chinese on Chen-po's left grunted:

"Well done, son of Wang Yü. But he will ask more questions. It is the way of the white men. You will see."

Wentworth did exactly that.

"Then why wait for 'em, Chen-po?"

"*Hai-ya!*" snorted the old Chinese. "Tell him any lie which comes into your head, son of Wang Yü. Or the truth. It makes no difference, and may stop these improper questions."

Bowing agreement, Wang Chen-po said sedately:

"Some of our younger men return to China, officer. All of this day they have been at their devotions, praying and making vows. They are late, but they will soon arrive, and then the banquet will begin. Be patient."

Jimmy Wentworth sat silently for a full minute and then said quietly:

"And if they don't come?"

His Chinese friend was startled, and fought to keep from showing it.

"What then?" Wentworth insisted.

"Even now," Chen-po said slowly, "they are probably leaving the sacred room of the lilies."

Jimmy Wentworth ran his finger around the empty bowl. Here was a ceremony he did not know. Of course he understood that before acts of violence, or patriotism possibly resulting in death, it was necessary for men to contemplate some beautiful object—an idol, a flower, a finely-made mirror, anything—to divorce their minds of all evil.

But there was a "room of lilies"?

"Never fear," muttered a Chinese to Chen-po; "he will ask about even our innermost customs. Do not tell him that our ten young men go with the white man-who-flies-in-air, son of Wang. Do not tell him that all ten have been trained, so pitifully little, to fly also. Lie now. Whatever comes into your head. Nevertheless"—to a companion, softly—"it is strange that the young men have not arrived after their ceremony of purification in the room of lilies. I, for one, do not like it."

Neither did Wentworth.

HE said loudly:

"Say, Chen-po, I got to telephone my chief. I forgot all about it. Where's there a telephone, anyhow?"

"When once a man sits at the banquet of the Approaching Year," grumbled a Chinese across the table, understanding the loudly spoken, simple words, "he remains in his place until the last bowl is drunk."

"Nevertheless," said another, addressing Chen-po, "it is wise to remain at peace with the white men. Son of Wang, it will be permitted for you to take him where he wishes to go."

A chorus of grunts agreed.

"I will show you the way," Wang Chen-po stated coldly.

In the hallway, alone with his friend, Wentworth said swiftly:

"I don't like it one bit, Chen-po. Where's this room of the lilies? I want a look-see."

"No man," said young Wang, "is allowed to enter the room unless the devotees have completed their devotions. You ought to know that, James. Oh, well, have your own way. I'll show you where it is. Not many, even in the Four Families, know the location. Ready?"

They were on the street before Wentworth said, "I don't like it."

"Neither does anyone else," retorted Chen-po. "But custom is custom. Why, we'd all die before we violated the room of lilies. The Old Men are worried, but you know it's improper to show it, just as my father can't show sorrow because Wang Hi'tze is dead. You—don't fool me, Jimmy—you think something's happened to the young men? You suspect the Japanese?"

"I wish I knew what to suspect," Wentworth said honestly, as they hurried along. "Harrington

had a china lily blossom in his buttonhole, you know—"

"Sure. Some of the young men probably gave it to him for luck."

"Was he at the room of lilies?"

"Hanged if I know, Jimmy. Might have been. It's up this street, then right turn on the alley. Fourth house. Second floor. Room in the rear. You go through one room, and another door's behind a long silken hanging. No window. Just a skylight That's kept open so the men can look up at the Vault of Heaven as they pray. Then—"

"I'm going on alone," Wentworth said. "You, Chen-po, go to the priests' house just below the cathedral. Tell Father Vincente I asked you to use the phone. Call Dunand. I want men at each end of the alley. He'll know how many. They are to arrest whoever they see. Make that plain, Chen-po! Anyone they see!"

Chen-po demurred uneasily.

"If there's a rumpus, Jimmy, the Old Men will raise the devil with me."

"If there's a mess," said Wentworth, "you'll be glad you violated every proper custom, old man!"

Chen-po put a hand on Wentworth's uniform.

"The young men are apt to kill you if you go into the room of lilies. They're armed. Let me go with you. Sometimes they work themselves up into a fervor, Jimmy. I ought to be there."

"I'm only taking a long chance that anything's wrong," Wentworth said. "But Wang Hi'tze was shot, Harrington was strangled, and the young men are mixed up in the same venture. It's my job to be suspicious. And I'm going to do my job. Please, Chen-po; get going!"

"And have you knifed by a fervent patriot, all worked up by contemplation of the sacred lilies and the blue Vault of Heaven."

"We'll see," said the sergeant of detectives. "Anyhow, do as I said. And in a hurry. I'm going to have a look-see at this room of lilies, and you can't talk me out of it."

CHAPTER IV

The Room of Death

LIKE the principal streets of Chinatown, the cross street was deserted also. The smaller shops, catering only to Chinese, were closed and shuttered. Inside, women awaited the return of their masters, after the heads of the household had eaten

and celebrated their fill. All was silent, dark.

Wentworth marched along, as if on patrol, until he came to the alley. Then he immediately slipped into a doorway, taking note of the position of the fourth house. That was the place Chen-po had told him. Fourth house, second floor, room in the rear, entered through another room in front of it. No window, but a skylight.

In the room ten young brave Chinese, who had spent the day in contemplation, and in arousing one another to the deeds they must do when they crossed the ocean and would fight for their country.

Had the Japanese learned of this meeting-place? Had the brown men arrived already, and, possibly through the skylight, potted the Chinese? It was the only thing to suppose. If this were the case, Harrington's murder was for the same reason, as everyone believed at Headquarters.

Wentworth, waiting in the doorway to give Chen-po a chance to telephone, knew how slim his own doubtful case was—a case depending upon bits of Chinese jute and the owner of the Silver Dollar dive. There was a man they must take down to Headquarters and question. Perhaps uselessly. The Silver Dollar proprietor would fear Kong Gai more than the police.

Wentworth thought, "Why can't I accept the obvious solution of these crimes? Am I going daffy about Kong Gai? Even the Wangs didn't mention him. I've got to keep a clear head. Just because I've found Kong Gai in almost every Chinatown crime is no reason why he's in this! Why, Harrington might have gambled away his twenty thousand, and the tongs had him murdered! Hi'tze might have been murdered for any one of a hundred reasons. Another tong might have finished him. No, that's out. Not on New Year's Eve. It's a mess. Just the same, I'm going to look inside this room in a minute."

From doorway to cellar, from cellar to behind low steps, and then to another doorway, Wentworth worked along the street. Fourth house. The next one. Black doorway. Was the door barred? Chen-po hadn't said so. Was it watched? Had the Four Families set 'binder guards? Or did they feel secure, believing no one knew the location of the room of the lilies? Did—here was the one chance!—did anyone else watch the doorway to the fourth house?

In the black, empty street, Wentworth lay down and wriggled ahead like a snake. Once a button

scraped on cement, and he lay very still, hand ready to go to his gun. All was silent as the grave.

Swiftly he leaped to his feet, and was inside the fourth house. The door had swung open on well-oiled hinges, noiselessly. Wentworth shut it carefully behind him in the dark, and then drew his gun.

If the Chinese inside the room of the lilies ran amuck, he must depend on his uniform to save him.

His groping hands found the banister, and he made his slow, cautious way to the second floor. More than once he wished for his electric torch, or even a match. The stairs creaked and groaned, and Wentworth wondered that no one opened a door to see what was taking place.

The house was as quiet as death.

Patiently the sergeant of detectives slid along beside the wall until he reached the very end of the hallway. His fingers found a doorknob, and he turned it. The room inside was empty of everything save one teakwood stand, on which a tiny lamp burned with sickly yellow flame. The room was close, suffocatingly close. It, like the room he expected to find behind it, was lighted only by a skylight above, which was a few inches open.

Jimmy Wentworth saw the silken hanging, and pushed it aside. He tried the knob; it turned, but the door did not open. He put his shoulder against it, increasing the pressure.

Baffled, he did the only possible thing: called out in Chinese:

"Oh, young men! The banquet of the Approaching Year is waiting for you! I will make many devotions tomorrow for summoning you, but the Old Men demand your presence. Open the door."

Silence.

Was the door of steel? If so, Wentworth could never break through, and the one plan he intended would be impossible, if anything were wrong in the room. It was entirely possible that the men inside, earlier, had departed for the Four Families tong chambers. Well, he had come this far; he might as well find out.

Wentworth slid his gun into its holster, backed away a half-pace, and then smashed elbow and shoulder at the door. A panel splintered and gave; Wentworth hammered through it. Automatically he did as he was trained; ran his hand down toward the inner knob.

The key was still in the lock!

In an instant Wentworth turned it, and opened the door.

For almost a full minute he stared inside, unable to determine anything in the dark chamber, unable to recognize anything save the overpowering odor of china lilies. The scent half dizzied him, seemed to burn through his eyes and into his brain.

Before the minute was over Wentworth went to the far door, and opened it also; a gusty breath of air from the black house almost blew out the feebly flickering rape seed oil lantern. Wentworth picked it up, protecting it with his other hand, and then again looked into the last room.

He stood as still as the ten bodies he now saw on the floor.

Ten dead Chinese! The young men of the Four Families, huddled on the floor as if asleep. On a stand was a lamp, burned out. Ranged around the room were ten enormous pots, blue Canton ware, filled with drooping china lilies, their white and yellow petals nodding as if they, too, were slowly dying.

WENTWORTH put down the lamp on the floor beside one of the Chinese. The man was dead. Wentworth knew that before he lifted a lax hand, the muscles not yet stiffened. There was even a faint warmth in the body.

Again the sense of nausea, not as strong as before, made Wentworth's head swim and his eyes burn. It was rather pleasant. Like being overpowered with delicious perfume, once you forgot the curious, Asiatic odor of the lilies.

Wentworth immediately looked for signs of food, which might have been poisoned. He found nothing at all. Had they partaken of poisonous liquor, or tea, before they had entered this chamber of death? Yet how peaceful each face was! A man poisoned did not look like this.

Each man in the room lay peacefully on the matting floor, as if he had gone to sleep—to death!—while at his contemplation of the china lilies, and the Vault of Heaven above . . .

And then Jimmy Wentworth looked up. There was the skylight. Was it so dusty that you couldn't see the sky? That would be wrong. Surely the Chinese were supposed to have a glimpse of the heavens, even if the presaged clouds had covered the sky at times. Slowly, high in the heavens, he made out the glitter of a distant star. As he stared, the bit of scintillating light almost hypnotized him;

he was no longer cognizant of the intervening panes of glass.

Chen-po said that the only air came through the skylight. It was closed. Wentworth muttered: "Flowers're taken out of sick rooms in hospitals. What'd china lilies do, in a sealed room with ten men and a lamp? Make a man sick? I wish my own head'd quit spinnin'. Makes me drowsy. Hard to think."

His drooping eyes snapped open wide. "That's what killed 'em! What a fool I am. Either they forgot to open the skylight, or somebody closed it on 'em, and they died in their sleep without knowin' what happened. Killed by white and yellow flowers. Killed by accident, or . . . by design?"

Wentworth was almost willing, despite his excitement, to sit down. He knew how disastrous this would be, should the door close on him. But the odorous lilies continued to breathe out their Oriental perfume in the room of death, just as they must have done during the day; they sapped the vitality of the powerful young white man until he at last managed to force himself to leave the room and close the door behind him.

It was several minutes before Wentworth could think clearly. Then he wasted no more time. He reentered the deadly room, picked up the body of one of the Chinese, and, with it in his arms, strode shakily along the hall, keeping contact with the wall with an elbow.

His mind was made up now. Chen-po wouldn't fail him. At either end of the alley would be men from Headquarters. Good. Now he would learn whether the ten young Chinese had been murdered, or had merely died through curious accident. His head was still a little confused. He no longer wondered who had killed the Chinese, if this was the case. He did not think of the Japanese at all, nor of war across the Pacific, nor anything except the deadly Kong Gai, the Venomous One of Chinatown . . . who was the sort of fiend with a warped brain that would think of using white and yellow blossoms to commit murder.

If the china lilies were really deadly Wentworth did not know. There was only the testimony of his own senses. Yet ten men had died in the room of lilies, and died with smiles on their faces. Was it accidental, or another link in the chain, of which Wang Hi'tze and Harrington were other parts? Were the Japanese the forgers of the chain of death,

or was it Kong Gai himself?

In another minute Wentworth felt he would know.

CHAPTER V Brothers of the Snake

JIMMY WENTWORTH, propping the slowly stiffening body of the dead young Chinese warrior against the wall, opened the front door an inch. First he breathed deep of the fresh night air, until his head completely cleared. Then he peered out.

The street was black as ever; black and silent.

Were Headquarters men at either end of the alley? If not, if Chen-po had failed in his telephoning, Wentworth might soon be in a difficult position. If they were, and his planning had been ridiculous and over-cautious, he would soon be well laughed at. This bothered him as little as the possible absence of assistance.

He slipped the hand holding his gun under the Chinese's own right armpit, and used his left hand to further support the dead body. With the muzzle of the gun he pried the door open a full foot, and crouched in the protection of the Asiatic's form.

Wentworth began to cry out in nasal, whining Cantonese:

"*Hai-ee!* Air! I must have air! I am sick, very sick!"

A swift beam of light from an electric torch flitted to the doorway, illuminating the Chinese who seemed to be standing there. Then it winked out, leaving everything blacker than before.

Wentworth moaned loudly:

"Come, oh Four Families men! Here is life! Air! I . . . I will live!" Then, screaming piercingly, the Chinatown detective sergeant made the body of the Chinese tremble violently. "I die," he shrieked. "Air! Air! I die!"

Wentworth hoped this would not bring the Headquarters men. He had asked that they go after anyone they saw—men running in the alley. If only they would wait now!

He let the body of the Chinese fall in the doorway realistically, and darted back into the hall, leaving the door open.

Across the dark street, emerging from a cellarway, were black-clad figures. Not one or two, but a full half-dozen. Slinking silken dressed 'binders, *bo' how doy*, all slipping toward the prone

figure of the dead Chinese like evil ghosts. No curious honest Chinese, these!

The stabbing finger of light flicked out again, lighting on the crumpled body. Someone said, "A knife into him, brothers of the snake, and then we will go up and finish the others. Kong Gai was wise to have us watch, even if it was supposed the lilies would kill the fools after we closed the window of the ceiling while they prayed—"

Then feet were pounding down the alley. An American voice roared:

"Don't move, or we'll shoot!"

Only once the startled hatchetmen looked—up the alley, and down. Blue-coated figures, guns out, raced from both directions. Escape into their lair across the street was not possible. With one accord they rushed to the stairs of the house of death.

Wentworth's gun roared. A hatchetman dropped, screaming. Two others fell over him. A second time Jimmy fired, as the three remaining 'binders tried to leap past their companions, and then the Headquarters men had all six Chinese captured and disarmed.

"We saw the flashlight," said Haight of the riot squad. "Then it was easy. Th' yellin' put us on our toes, but we waited to see somebody, like your Chink friend insisted. What is it, Jimmy? Tong outbreak? The chief's waitin' for a report."

Wentworth said:

"Can't tell yet. You fellows wait here. Somebody'd better get the wagon for these 'binders. And I've got nine more Chinese upstairs. Dead."

"What? Did you get 'em?"

"Somebody else did," Jimmy said. "I'll be back in a few minutes. Can I borrow a flash?"

Wentworth hurried up to the room of death. He placed several of the teakwood stands together, and then carefully mounted to the skylight, smashing the glass. He managed to get his head and shoulders through the aperture, wondering if he would draw fire from anywhere, or if all the hatchetmen of Kong Gai assigned to this task had been watching across the street.

There was no shot. Wentworth was able to examine the dusty remains of the skylight sufficiently to find the marks of hands, of fingers. Good prints. Enough to hang the Chinese who had made them, provided they were the men captured by Headquarters. Jimmy took no chance that the skylight might be removed before the

photographers could come. Instead of waiting, he took with him several of the larger pieces of glass, all well marked.

FINALLY the Headquarters men marched their captives to the taxis waiting three blocks distant, just outside of Chinatown. The dead wagon was ordered. And at last Wentworth was back in Captain Dunand's office.

"Fingerprint 'em," the gray-haired captain of detectives grunted, after hearing his sergeant's story. "Maybe we can't hang 'em, but we'll try. And at th' worst we'll deport the lot!"

"First, let's search them," Wentworth suggested.

Even the wounded *bo' how doy* was handcuffed, after being given first aid. Detectives went about their task efficiently. From each neck a token-bag was removed. Every silken bag contained the likeness of a king cobra. Best of all, one of the Chinese had a short rope wound about his middle. A rope of Chinese jute. Yellow. Not whitish-gray Indian jute. Stiff jute. An assassin's rope.

Dr. Nye stammered:

"We found more pieces of that stuff, sergeant! That's the rope with which Harrington was bound!"

"What works one way might work another," Jimmy Wentworth said. "Think there's a chance of the stiff, bristly jute having removed any bits of fabric from Harrington's clothing?"

The Headquarters doctor said:

"A microscope will show! If not, a test for color will. We'll analyze!"

"Print 'em," growled Dunand, glaring at these 'binders who had killed a courageous white man about to go to defend their own country.

Wentworth's quick eyes told him something.

"Look at the hands of the wounded hatchetman, chief," he said softly. "No long nails! All the others have 'em, of course. He's the biggest and strongest of the lot. Powerful hands. He's the one who strangled Harrington after his mates bound the white man!"

Sure enough, the wounded 'binder had fingernails cut very short.

"I looked for indentations—cuts—on Harrington's neck," Wentworth told the captain. "Found none. That put me off. Made me suppose it really was a Japanese crime. 'Binders are proud of their long nails—"

Dunand muttered, "How about the Japanese that killed Wang Hi'tze, Jimmy?"

"Do any good to question him, sir?"

"Can't do it. He's a hophead, Jimmy. Bad one."

Jimmy Wentworth relaxed. The last link in the chain forged at last!

"If you'll keep the stuff away from him for a bit, chief, and then let him talk, with plenty of proper witnesses, he'll tell you that Kong Gai told him 'No more hop' unless he killed Wang Hi'tze. That's guessing. But you'll find out it's true."

"But why the murdering at all, sergeant?"

Every officer and detective in the room leaned forward.

"The best I can do," said Jimmy Wentworth, "is to tell you what little I know. Harrington was carrying a large sum of money. It happened to be twenty thousand dollars, but it might have been more. That was kept secret. Kong Gai has the money now, chief. He had plenty of time to plan the crimes. Everything pointed to murder done by Japanese, to prevent the aviator and his Chinese assistants from going to Shanghai. It's the sort of affair Kong Gai would figure up. He'd enjoy watching us run rings around ourselves, while he sat back and laughed! I think the money was at the bottom of the business, although Kong Gai loves to stir up trouble—to kill for the sake of killing. If—"

Dr. Nye came bustling over, his face shining.

"I've found it!" he cried. "Blyth doesn't mention it. Neither do some of the other authorities. But look here, in this book, captain! Read it! 'Narcissus poisoning'! No, not there, please. That's narcissin. Different poison altogether. See what it says? 'The perfume from a certain type of narcissus blossom, namely, the china lily, has been known to produce death when breathed for a considerable time in a closed room. No trace of the poison can be discovered after death.' And that's how the ten young Chinamen were killed!"

"That's how," said Wentworth.

"You knew it, Jimmy?" demanded Dunand.

"No, chief. I only knew when I went into the room I became sick. Doctor, does it tell how the poison works?"

"Why, yes, a little. 'The sensation of narcissus poisoning is said to be very pleasant in the early stages, and completely narcotizes the victim. It is never recognized as deadly until action on the part of the victim is too late.'"

"I missed the pleasant part," Wentworth said. "But the poor devils in the room of the lilies died smiling . . . now, I'll be off, chief. Got to take my

chair at the Four Families banquet.”

“Be a sad affair now, eh?”

WENTWORTH said, “It would be a whole lot worse if we didn’t have this prime collection of ‘binders here, chief.”

“They’ll swing,” said Dunand. “Thanks to you, sergeant.”

Jimmy Wentworth wanted to hurry. A police car drove him to the door of the Four Families tong, and he went hastily inside. Wang Chen-po had returned. High, laughing Chinese voices, warmed with wine, fought with the shriek and clatter of the orchestra. The air was heavy with cigarette smoke and the aroma of magnificently cooked food. The gay family banners flaunted themselves as before.

The chairs of the ten men were removed; in their places were ten gorgeously ornamented coffins. No food was placed on the plates intended for the young Chinese, nor on Wang Hi’tze’s, but before each a taper burned with white and yellow flame. One china lily blossom, white and yellow also, lay in front of the candle.

Eyes may have flicked toward the young sergeant of detectives as he sat down, but no other sign of his presence was made, except when old Wang Yü said cheerfully, “Our guest must eat rapidly, for he is doubtless hungry. Since he departed on duty, he can be forgiven any discourteous intent.”

Wentworth said loudly to Wang Chen-po:

“I’m certainly hungry.”

“Don’t be a fool,” growled his friend. “Tell me, quickly: what happened, Jimmy? Anything?”

“How’d you know the ten are dead?”

“A Four Families hatchetman told us there were shots, Jim. Tell me!”

“Killed by Kong Gai. All of ‘em. Kong Gai finished Wang Hi’tze. And Harrington.”

“And?”

“We didn’t come anywhere near Kong Gai. But we’ve got the others.”

“You aren’t fooling, Jimmy?”

“If we can’t hang ‘em, they’ll be deported.”

Wang Chen-po said only:

“Ah!” and then stood up. He walked quickly to the table where old Wang Yü sat between a rich Chinese merchant and the head of an American bank; then, dutifully, he bowed three times, and requested permission to speak.

“If your words are not important,” snapped old

Wang Yü, “I will beat you with my slipper when we return to our miserable house. What is it you would say?”

Every ear in the room—every Oriental ear—was listening.

“Those who killed the honorable and learned Wang Hi’tze have been caught, my father,” said Chen-po.

“Is it so? And is that all you have to tell me?”

“Those who killed the ten young and brave men of the Four Families are also captured, honorable Elder Wang.”

The room was as quiet now as the deadly chamber of lilies had been.

“That,” said Wang Yü, “is swift vengeance for our tong. I bend my head before the justice of the gods. Who, oh son of mine, has captured these two-legged beasts of horror?”

“A white man, Elder Wang.”

Voices buzzed once as the Chinese were unable to restrain their excitement, and then a glare from old Wang brought silence.

“So,” he decided. “We are revenged. But, I ask”—he raised his cracked old voice—“is it proper that a man other than of the families of Wang, Ying, Yee, and G’oung bring our enemies to justice? I am of the opinion that it is not. Therefore, until that man, white or yellow, be a member of the Four Families tong, my head is bowed in shame. How much longer must it remain so?”

Wentworth realized that great praise was being given him by the distressed, unhappy tong, and then as the true meaning of Wang Yü’s words became clear, his face became very pale. What an honor! Did Wang Yü really mean it? Would the other Chinese agree?

Three of the influential men of the tong, wordlessly, left their places, and shuffled to the image of Kuan Yin glittering in a corner. From the hands of the goddess they took a silken robe, into which pearls had been woven, and brought it to where Wentworth sat.

In Chinese one of the men said, as he slipped the beautiful strands over Wentworth’s head, “Welcome, O newest brother of the Four Families! Your blood is ours. Our lives are yours. You are white, but now you are our brother nevertheless.”

Applause rippled through the members of the tong.

Wentworth, very pleased and excited, knowing as he did that no other white man had ever been

made a member of a Chinese tong, stammered—
forgetfully—in pure Mandarin:

“*Ya’ s’a’am*. Such a great honor for this
miserable person—”

“*Hai-ee!*” shrilled a Chinese. “The gods speak
through his lips! For he is speaking in our
language, and he does not know a word of it!”

