

Jap Ketchum Hell



By
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Pat Murphy's Chinese laundryman had ideas of his own on how to clean up spies. There was a certain Jap he intended to hang up to dry. But Pat discovered that blood does not wash out so easily when it's your own blood you take to the cleaner's.

PAT MURPHY leaned against the wooden counter, and watched the laundryman shuffle over to the

shelves which housed the packages of laundry. Slipped feet scraped along the cold concrete floor like dry leaves. Pat turned his head a little, cast his eyes toward the dark doorway which led to the rear of the Chinese hand laundry. At any moment he expected Soo Yong Wah to come out to him, beaming as usual, for the man before him was not Soo Yong Wah.

There was no sound except for the dry rustle of paper as the Chinese matched the

ticket against packages. Pat looked at him again, noted with disinterest the thin cheap clothes, threadbare but clean.

Pat took out a cigarette. "Where's Soo Yong Wah?" he asked, and set the cigarette between long firm lips.

"He go 'way," mumbled the Chinaman, reaching up for a brown paper bundle. He took it down, shuffled back over to the ironing table, set it down. Once more he compared the tickets.

Pat scratched a match, firing his cigarette. "Go away?" he asked, and looked up out of the window. Little of the darkening afternoon light crept down to this basement store.

The Chinaman lifted the bundle to the counter. "He go 'way," he said. "Sebenty cents. Soo Yong Wah my cousin. Go join up China ahmee!"

"Oh, good!" said Pat, and reached into his trouser pocket. "The old buzzard joined the army, did he?"

The Chinaman lifted puzzled almond-shaped eyes. "Buzzah?"

"Oh, friend, friend!" Pat explained, and placed a dollar on the counter.

Instantly the Chinese smiled wide. "Flenn! Flenn! Lee Ching hapee know Flenn Soo Yong Wah. You come laundelly Lee Ching now, yes? Cousin go China ahmee."

"Be glad to."

"Cousin go 'way. Me ketchum laundelly. You come laundelly Lee Ching. Fussaclassa laundellyman."

Lee Ching pulled out a cigar box, laboriously counted out the change, murmuring in his own tongue as he did so.

Pat picked up the coins, and Lee Ching grinned at him again. "You big man. Mebee you join China ahmee? China ahmee good ahmee. Likum Amellican sohjah."

"Not the Chinese army," Pat chuckled. "American army. Very soon. Ketchum

sohjah boy two week time."

Lee Ching bowed, his face beaming. "Is good. Velly good! I washum laundelly cheap you Amellican sohjah. Allee same China ahmee, Amellican ahmee, allee same ahmee."

"That's right," said Pat, and dropped his change into the China Relief box on the counter. He took up his package.

"You no forget," Lee Ching called after him. "Soo Yong Wah say many good cussimer come to laundelly."

"Sure, sure. Any cousin of Soo Yong Wah is a cousin of mine." Pat smiled, and with a wave of his hand, left the dismal store.

A short time later, he unwrapped his laundry to place it in his chest of drawers. He was a little astonished when a piece of paper slipped from between the shirts and fluttered to his feet. He set the shirts down in the compartment, bent down and picked it up. It was written on a piece of torn white paper, and read:

Honorable friend, Detective Murphy. You go 632 Thirty Street, the West, find Japanese dog. He say he Chinese. Not so. He Japanese spy Hashimura. I go follow now. If true I think Japanese spy he die. I will kill. I true son of China, Soo Yong Wah.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Pat exclaimed, and rushed for his hat and coat.

HE HURRIED to detective headquarters and put the note before Jim Ransome, his partner.

"Hey, Jim! What d'ya think of this? Y'know that little Chinese laundry I bring my shirts to? It seems the old bird joined the Chinese Army, and his cousin took over. But take a look at this note Soo Yong Wah put in my laundry! It looks like the little Chinaman took up Jap spy hunting on his own hook!"

Jim frowned thoughtfully as he

finished the letter. "Hashimura! Now that's something! The F.B.I. is looking high and low for that stinking yellow rat!"

"I thought the name sounded familiar. And I don't know how long this note's been written. What about Hashimura?"

"This Jap, the way I get it, managed to sneak into the country about two months ago. The F.B.I. believes he was dropped off a boat near the coast of California, where he swam ashore. He's a dangerous and active saboteur. The cops almost nabbed him around Los Angeles, but before they could slap the cuffs on him, he made a daring escape. They traced him to New York, but that's as far as they got, last time I heard."

"So what's keeping us? Let's go have a look at this address on 632 Thirty Street, the West."

The address proved to be a cheap little boarding house, a crummy brownstone house in the middle of the street. The two men climbed out of their car and entered the shabby building. In answer to their ring, a short, squat woman with a mess of dirty gray hair asked insolently what they wanted.

Pat flashed his badge and got instant reaction. She brightened, shoved pudgy fingers through her hair. "Now wait a minute, coppers. I ain't done nothin'. I run a respectable house, see?"

"We believe you," Pat said quietly, peering down the long dark ill-lit hallway. "You got a Jap livin' in this house?"

"A Jap!" she cried out shrilly, outraged indignance in her tone. "Are you insultin' me? Have I got a Jap livin' in me house! I'll sue ye for slander!"

"Got a Chinaman?"

"That's different. I got one, a Sun Ping. Lives upstairs, top floor rear. Quiet duck, he don't bother nobody. What's he done?"

Pat asked, "How do you know he's

Chinese?"

She was patient with Pat's stupidity. "Why, by the button! It says, *I am a Chinese* on the button!"

"Doesn't mean a thing. Let's have a look at him."

"Why. . ." she sang out, as she mounted the stairs, "If that guy is a Jap, so help me, I'll fumigate the house. Me! A Jap! Livin' in me nice clean house! I'll brain 'im!" She turned around, her eyes flashing in anger. "If he's a Jap, I'll personally cut his head off with me scissors!"

Pat cautioned her to be silent, and she did, tightening her lips in disapproval. When they reached the third floor, she pointed to the door in question, and Pat stepped up with a gun in his hands. Jim motioned for the woman to step aside, and taking out his gun too, pressed himself up against the wall.

Pat knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again, louder. Still no answer.

"Got keys?" he asked the landlady, who immediately fumbled through a pocket and brought out a key.

PAT put the key in the lock, turned, and flung open the door. He took one step through the doorway and came to a dead halt, a look of honor biting through his face.

The landlady, directly behind him, caught up her breath, made a noise that sounded like, "Googg," and dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

Jim sprang around the door, and the two detectives stared in stunned shock at the body on the floor. It was that of a small man, dressed in blood-washed Japanese garb. A wide sash was bound about his waist, and his feet were encased in white socks. The head had been severed from the body.

Pat's face screwed up with the

sickened revulsion he felt, while Jim's face turned green. He clutched his stomach.

"I'm gonna get sick," he warned. "I'm gonna get sick!"

"You do," Pat spat out with a bravado he did not feel, "and I'll bust you one! Go help the landlady!"

Pat had never seen anything quite so repulsive. It sent waves of nausea churning through him.

The place was spattered with blood.

But the thing that shocked Pat most was that the head was nowhere in evidence. Just the twisted, bloodstained body, with the dark smear between the shoulders.

Jim was busy with the landlady, who was coming out of it; He helped her to her feet, and she reeled unsteadily out of the room.

"Glory be," she moaned, "I didn't mean it! What I said about cuttin' his head off! You know how sometimes you say them things? I was just kiddin'. I didn't do that to him."

"We know who killed him!" Pat said tersely, and Jim led her outside to the hall and left her there.

Returning to the room, he shut the door after him. Pat looked down at the body again. The simple white Japanese toga was blood-soaked at the shoulders, and stiff. One knee was doubled up under him.

It was the white socks on the feet that caught Pat's attention. He bent down, studied the foot a moment. Then to Jim's amazement, Pat reached over, drew off one of the socks, looked at the foot, then turned around, looking for the shoes.

He found the two sandals with leather thongs, neatly standing side by side under a chair close by. Next to them was the weapon which had severed the head.

"That's the baby that did the

decapitation." Pat pointed to the sword, and rose to his feet.

"But Pat," Jim said thickly, his eyes trying to avoid the ugly scene, "where's the head? I don't see the head!"

"So look around, look around!" Pat growled.

Jim's eyes widened, as he gawked stupidly. "Who me? I should look—I don't wanna find the thing!"

"You probably won't!" Pat said, "but look anyway!"

Pat bent down over the knife. "Some sword! I never thought Soo Yong Wah had it in him. Decapitation! Ugh!"

Apprehensively, Jim began his search under things, here and there, spending a long time with places he knew the head wasn't.

Pat stepped over to the telephone and called headquarters. That done, he rummaged through things too. He found papers in the desk which proved conclusively they belonged to Maki Hashimura.

In one of the pockets of the gown was an identification, proving that this was the spy the F.B.I. was looking for. There was also a valuable paper which proved this man had most certainly been active in sabotage movements.

THEY looked through every nook and cranny of the small, cramped apartment, but did not unearth the head.

"Well!" Jim sighed, mopping his brow, the color back in his face again. "Of one thing I am sure! You can kiss Soo Yong Wah good-by. We'll never see that guy again!"

"I agree with you!" Pat said, and threw some papers down on the desk.

"But who cares?" Jim said lightly. "This ain't exactly murder, except that Soo Yong Wah could have been a little less—well, less violent! This Hashimura was a

dangerous spy, an enemy to the country. This ain't murder, it's war!"

"Yeah," grumbled Pat, "but I think we ought to find him anyway, if only to pin a medal on the guy. One Jap less. Except—" His eyes slid back to the body. "Decapitation!"

Jim lifted heavy shoulders. "So maybe his tong went in for that sort of thing with enemies of their government."

"First time I ever heard of a Chinaman being a head hunter!"

"So he wanted a trophy!"

"I wonder if Lee Ching knows where Soo Yong Wah is."

"Well that's it!" Jim exclaimed. "These Chinese stick together. Soo Yong Wah didn't join the army, but is hiding out because he did this to the Jap."

"That's logical."

"Still—it ain't nice cuttin' heads off people!"

"Japs," Pat reminded him, "ain't people!"

"You got something there, Pat!"

Not many minutes later, the two men hurried down the wooden stairs which led to the cellar store of the Chinese hand laundry. Lee Ching crept out of the murky shadows and smiled widely when he saw Pat Murphy again. He bowed politely, looking at Jim. "More cussimer?"

Pat shook his head, leaned easily over the counter. "No. I want you to tell me where Soo Yong Wah really is."

The smile froze, then slowly faded. "He go 'way. China ahmee. He go 'way."

"How long you ketchum this business?"

"Ketchum laundelly? Two, three day, mebee."

"Tell me, did Soo Yong Wah ever speak to you about Hashimura?"

A light flickered in the almond eyes. "Hashimura?" he repeated slowly. "Is Japanese name!"

"I know it."

"You no say Japanese name in Lee Ching laundelly!"

"Hashimura? The name means nothing to you?"

"Me no know Japanese." Lee Ching's voice rose excitedly. "I kill Japanese I see him. I kill dog like true son of China."

"I understand." Pat sighed, and reached slowly into his shoulder holster. He brought out a gun, hefted it, eyeing Lee Ching who paled visibly.

"Thissee gun," Pat told him and smiled.

Lee Ching nodded slowly, his eyes refusing to leave the gun.

"One bullet," Pat explained, "and you dead duck. You ketchum?"

"I—ketch—um."

"Now that we understand each other, if you don't mind"—Pat continued to hold that smile on his lips, but his fingers tightened around the gun—"you will please take off your slippers."

"Sl-slippah?" the eyes came up, met his.

"Yeah, slippers! Take 'em off! And now!" Pat's voice seemed to fill the store and carried authority.

The man mumbled something, hesitated but an instant, then looked at the gun again. He quickly stepped out of his slippers, and stood back on the cement floor in socks.

"Thanks," Pat said with sarcasm. "Now take off a sock."

There was a silence while Jim shifted weight uneasily.

"Take off your socks!" roared Pat, and Lee Ching jumped to oblige. With a quick yank a sock was off. He stood there, one foot bare, and scowled irritably.

Pat brandished his gun. "Okay, Jim, slap the handcuffs on him. He's it!"

"Now wait a minute, Pat—" Jim began.

IN THAT instant Lee Ching sprang toward the counter, his hand reaching in under it. But before he could withdraw it again, Pat's gun barked once. The man stiffened, with supreme effort brought his arm up. There was a gun in his hand.

Pat's gun blazed again. The man lurched against the counter, his finger pulled against the trigger of his gun, but the bullet went wild. He folded to the floor and lay still.

"But—Pat! I don't get it! Why did you want to slap the handcuffs on this bird?"

"Because he isn't Chinese, see? This guy here is Hashimura, and the body we found is that of Soo Yang Wah! The way I figure it, Soo Yong Wah followed Hashimura, ready to rub the Jap out just as soon as he made sure he was a Jap. Sometimes, you see, it's very hard to tell.

"I think Soo Yong Wah went up to the Jap's place to stick a knife in him, or maybe shoot him. But Soo Yong Wah wouldn't go in for any fancy decapitation! You see, a corpse without a head makes a Chinaman look pretty much like a Jap.

"We were supposed to think Hashimura dead. That would then give him a chance to get out and do some real damage in this country. The F.B.I. was closing in on him, and Soo Yong Wah somehow got wise. Hashimura acted. Instead of the Chinaman killing him, he killed Soo Yong Wah, dressed him up in Jap clothes, cut his head off, and beat it.

"He had to hide out someplace, so he came here, pretended he was Soo Yong Wah's cousin, and almost got away with it.

"Naturally, he didn't know that Soo Yong Wah, knowing I was a detective, would think it advisable to send me a note

in the shirts. So Hashimura hid out here for a while. He didn't light the lights, and it's pretty dark down here. Any Chinese coming in here, would get a fistful of trouble, see? Is everything quite plain now?"

"Yeah, fine, Pat, fine. But how the hell'd you know, with the head missin', that it was a Chink, not a Jap?"

"Simple! Hashimura entered this country illegally just two months ago, right?"

"Yeah."

"Hashimura spent most of his life in Nippon?"

"Yeah."

"Well, Jim, Chinese wear slippers on their feet. The Japs wear sandals with thick leather thongs. These thongs come up between the big toe and the second toe. That, Jim, gives those two toes a tendency to spread pretty wide apart from each other.

"You see, I thought it was funny, when I looked at the feet of the corpse, to find that the toes were all close together. And yet thonged sandals were under the chair, and the toes should have been spread apart. That's why I had to have a look at this guy's toes. I knew that the body was that of a Chinese, not a Jap.

"Soo Yong Wah was missing, and this was not the body of Hashimura. Two and two adding up to a lot of things! So take a squint at 'Lee Ching's' toes!"

Jim did, and sure enough, the big toe was quite noticeably spread apart from the others.

"That," said Jim, "is what I call keepin' up on your toes!"

Pat Murphy set his head back and laughed.