

Melody of Murder

*When Kung Li Refuses to Pay
Tribute, Murder Stalks
Chinatown!*



"Police—have police come—"

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NIGHT brooded over the crooked streets of the Chinese section of the city. Silent figures glided through the shadows. From somewhere not far away came the plaintive notes of a flute lilting an air as old as the walls of China.

Kung Li sighed as he heard the familiar melody. It was part of what once he had known so well, part of the life of his honorable ancestors, of his own life as a boy before he had come to this new strange land twenty years ago.

"Hurry up—I ain't got all night to wait around here," snarled "Snapper" Hogan, the thin, hard-faced man who had been watching as Kung Li jotted down figures on a piece of paper on the table in front of him. "You heard me say you was to figure the week's take for your business—so we can tell you our cut for protection."

"So sorry," mumbled Kung Li as he adjusted the dark glasses that shielded his eyes from the light that had grown too strong for them. "Much better I count in

Chinese. Other was most difficult for man of little education like Kung Li."

"I don't care how you figure it out," Hogan growled impatiently. "But it better be right—and you better be able to pay up tonight. We've been letting you off easy. Ain't collected from you for over a month."

"Month but one little grain in the sands of time—maybe not that," said the elderly owner of the Chinese restaurant. He picked up a paint brush, jabbed it into a small bottle of ink and began to make strange Chinese figures on the paper.

"Only have thirty customer this week. Maybe make fifty dollar all together."

"Oh, yeah!" said Hogan. "We're collectin' two hundred bucks—and that ain't no joke. You can't pull no fast ones on me, Kung. I been checking on this place and you do a damn good business. Two hundred bucks it is, so shell out."

"You ask what Kung Li no can do," said the restaurant owner.

Abruptly a heavy automatic appeared

in Snapper Hogan's hand as Kung Li swung his heavy chair around. A look of fear crossed his face as he saw the weapon in the racketeer's hand.

"Two hundred bucks!" said Hogan. "Now! Or I'll let you have it!"

Kung Li was trembling. He had told the truth. It had been a bad week and even though he and his assistant, likewise the headwaiter, Wung, had worked hard they had not earned anything like two hundred dollars.

THE Chinese restaurant owner had experienced the sensation of dread warning tonight. Something told him that he was close to the whispering wings of Death. It had been because of this that he had dressed himself as would have befitted his rank, for was he not the son of the sons of mandarins?

His expression did not change, but hope leaped into his heart as he saw Wung glide out from the shadows of the big room that was Kung Li's living quarters in back of the restaurant. He had not failed to notice the faint glitter of steel from the blade of the long knife that Wung held in his hand.

"I'll give you just one minute, Kung Li," snapped Hogan. "The boss said we was to make you an example for the rest of the guys that are behind in their payments."

The gunman snarled as he caught a fleeting glimpse of Wung lunging toward him with the knife. Instinctively his fingers tightened on the trigger of the automatic. The .45 roared.

Kung Li uttered a cry of pain. His face was contorted into a grimace of horror as he died. His glasses dropped to the floor and he was very still as he slumped back in his chair.

Hogan swung around as he felt the knife ripping into his arm. Again he fired

and Wung dropped to the floor. The gangster laughed harshly, his eyes glittering with the killer light.

He paid no further attention to the two still forms as he hastily searched the place, scooping what money he found into his pockets. It was disappointingly little, just as Kung Li had said.

Hogan looked at the two motionless forms. Carefully he took out his handkerchief and wiped his gun clean of fingerprints. This done to his satisfaction, he forced the weapon into the hand of Wung. The knife was on the floor beside the restaurant owner's assistant.

"Now the police will figure these two guys got into a fight and killed each other," muttered Hogan. "Anyway, I'm in the clear."

He quietly left the restaurant by a back way and disappeared in the shadows of the night. Far off the flute was still playing the plaintive melody that had been Kung Li's requiem. The music came from a dark window directly opposite that of the restaurant owner's back room.

For a time there was nothing but the hush of death in that back room. Then Wung moaned and opened his eyes. Slowly, painfully, he dragged himself across the floor and picked up the receiver of a telephone that stood on a table.

"Police—" he whispered as he heard Central's voice. "Have police come to Kung Li's Restaurant—been murder—"

The phone dropped from his hands and his eyes grew glazed. Wung had gone to join his ancestors as had Kung Li.

Twenty minutes later two patrol cars were parked in front of the Chinese restaurant. Uniformed men were searching in and outside the building, questioning those stolid people of the Chinese district—who had seen nothing and heard nothing.

"This looks like an easy one," said the

captain in charge as he glanced at the grey-haired detective who stood beside him. "What do you think, Martin?"

"That you believe these two got into a fight and killed each other," said Martin quietly. "But you are wrong, Captain. This is a double murder and the killer got away."

They had opened the windows of the room and a breeze swept through the place. Bill Martin watched it blow a slip of paper off the table. He walked over and picked up the paper. For a moment he studied the Chinese characters that had been painted on it.

"Looks like Kung Li was trying to figure out how much he had made lately," he said, as he gazed at the paper. "Here is ten dollars written out in English, along with the Chinese stuff." He thrust the paper into his pocket. "I'll look this over when I have more time, Captain. I used to be able to read a little Chinese, but I'll have to get back into the swing of it."

From somewhere in the night came the wailing of a flute. Martin frowned as he heard it—

BY ten o'clock the next night Snapper Hogan had a case of the jitters. Every time he was alone he seemed to hear a flute playing mournfully. He remembered that he had heard the same sound just after he had killed the two Chinese, and it was beginning to haunt him.

He had seen a brief item in the papers regarding the murder of the two Chinese. The item had stated that they had apparently killed each other during a quarrel. So he was sure that he was clear in that respect. But why was the music of that flute haunting him?

It got on his nerves to such an extent that he decided that he had to do something about it. He went back to his apartment with the idea of getting good

and drunk. As he reached it he found that the door was standing half open.

With his newly purchased gun in his hand Snapper Hogan stepped inside. A quick search of the place told him that there was no one in the apartment. He was alone. And then he saw the dark glasses lying on the table—glasses just like those that had fallen from Kung Li's face when Hogan had killed him.

"It ain't true," muttered the gunman. "There's no such things as ghosts. There ain't, I say."

He paused and stood trembling. From somewhere close by came the wailing of the flute. Snapper Hogan was more frightened than he had ever been before in his life. This was something that he could not fight with bullets; something horrible and eerie to his warped killer's mind.

"All right, Hogan," said a quiet voice from the doorway. "You had better come along with me now."

The gunman found himself gazing at a slender grey-haired man who held a gun in one hand. On the man's vest was a detective's badge.

"You've got me," snarled Hogan. "I'll go to jail—I'll do anything to get away from the sound of that damn flute!"

"What flute?" asked the detective in surprise.

"The one that has been haunting me ever since—" Hogan broke off with a snarl.

"Ever since you killed Kung Li and his headwaiter?" demanded Martin.

"No," said Hogan quickly. "I don't know nothing about that."

"You don't have to confess, Hogan," said Martin. "Kung Li told us that you killed him. He wrote it in Chinese when you thought he was figuring out how much he had made during the week. Funny, but he was sure you were going to murder him. He was so excited that he messed up

the Chinese symbols so much that a Chinese friend of mine and myself worked on them for almost twenty-four hours before we managed to be sure of your name.”

“But the flute?” demanded Hogan. “Was that—Kung Li?”

“I tell you I don’t know anything about the flute,” said Martin. “I heard one playing just after we found the bodies last night and it gave me the creeps.”

“Ah Sing make music with flute,” said a voice from the doorway.

Both men turned to see an ancient Chinese standing there, still holding a flute in his withered hand.

“So you have been following him around and making that weird music,” said Martin. “But, why, Ah Sing? How did you know he was the murderer?”

“Saw him kill Kung Li and Wung from my window across the way,” answered Ah Sing. “Ah Sing ‘fraid to go police—might not believe. So just follow this man around and play same thing I play last night when my friends killed. Hope this drive murderer crazy—and police lock him up.”