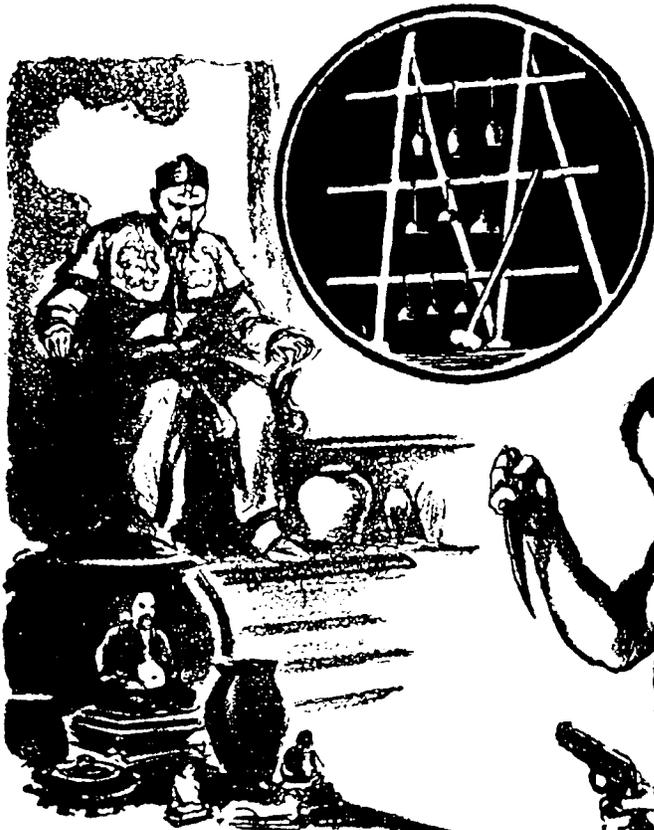


BELLS OF PELL STREET

By
ARTHUR J. BURKS



Noel's pistol bore full on the forehead of Chu Chul. He pressed the trigger.

A WEIRD MELODY THOSE
TINKLING BRASSES TONED
OUT AS LIFE ITSELF HUNG
BY THE BALANCE OF A CHIME
WHEN DORUS NOEL AND CHU
CHUL MATCHED CUNNING IN
THE GROTTOS OF CHINATOWN.

“WELL, I’m damned,” said Dorus Noel, “if this isn’t the queerest day I ever spent! Three hours on Park Avenue, at a tea given by the elite to a Chinese actor. And China’s best though he is, is still an actor, than which profession there is none lower in China. He was made over by all the society folks as though he had been a king or something.”

As Dorus Noel spoke, ostensibly to his

Chinese “boy”, his hands absent-mindedly fingered the strange gifts which had come to him during his absence at the tea. He scarcely saw the ancient musical instruments, much as he liked such things, for a moment or two, because he was thinking of Mei Ying, the actor. From the second he had clasped hands with the actor—doing it with his tongue in his cheek because his society hosts expected it of him—he had had a feeling of

repulsion. There had been something unclean about Mei Ying. He had felt sure, too, that he had seen something akin to hatred in the eyes of the gorgeously, orientally gowned actor.

He shrugged his shoulders, though, and gave closer attention to the three-barred frame, shaped oddly like an "H" with an extra bar across its middle and one across the top, containing the nine bells, three bells to each bar.

Those bells were the Chinese musical scale and were sounded by a little wooden mallet which was part of the gift.

The other instrument was the oldest known to the Chinese. It looked like a teapot and one played it by blowing into the spout. Where the lid should have been were twenty-four resonance tubes, with holes in the sides. One played them by fast manipulation of the fingers, and one had almost to inherit the art of playing them.

How was Dorus Noel to guess that both the instrument of the nine bells and that of the twenty-four resonance tubes were really weapons of murder—and the strangest and most horrible that had ever come to Chinatown?

Dorus Noel was undercover man for the police in Chinatown, chosen for the job because he had lived years in China. His task was to see that the Chinese kept the peace.

He gave the nine bells a caressing tap of the mallet before he bade his boy good night. Then he turned in and was instantly asleep. He was dreaming of Mei Ying, the actor, and seeing him as a bird of prey with long talons, when he snapped awake as though someone had slapped his face. For a moment he thought what he heard had been part of his nightmare. But that it had been very real was proved by the fact that his whole body was bathed in perspiration.

"Hold onto yourself," he whispered softly, his heart pounding with excitement. "Maybe a cat went sleepwalking on the frame."

The sound which had wakened him had been the rhythmic chiming of the nine bells! No cat could have caused their chiming like that. The bells had been played by human hands—talented hands—Chinese hands. Yet how? Why? He had taken all the usual precautions that even the bravest man of good sense takes when he lives in the land of his enemies—barring his doors and windows, affixing to them noise-making devices of his own. Nobody could have entered without making a noise, and he had been alone in the house on retiring, Sang Chiu having gone back to some

hovel near the Bowery. The "boy" wouldn't return until morning.

Even as he listened, his eyes narrowed in the darkness and he felt his hackles rising like a fighting dog's; for the bells had started ringing again, and this could not possibly be a dream! The gifts of musical instruments which, according to Sang Chiu had been delivered as coming from "a friend of your Peking days," were tied up with some new horror in Chinatown, for Chinese are not given to practical joking. Who could it be? Chu Chul, the Cricket? He was dead. The White Wasp? She had left the country between sunset and dawn on the heels of a murder charge. Dorus Noel had brought about both happy events. Who, then? Friends of either Chu Chul or The White Wasp?

NOEL, grasping his automatic in his right hand, left his bed without sound and strode on tiptoe to the door which gave onto the room of his Chinese relics. At the door he did a strange thing. He stooped, his torso straight forward from his waist, and covered his throat with his forearm.

"Who's there?" his voice cracked like the lash of a whip.

There was no answer. But a breath of wind fanned his cheek and something smacked into the wall of his bedroom, many feet behind him. He sucked in his breath. He knew the feel in passing, and the sound in striking, of a thrown knife. No ghost threw knives. Had he stood erect the knife would have got him. His hand went to the light switch inside the door.

His bedroom was flooded with light. So, too, in a second, was the room of the bells. Both rooms were empty of human occupancy, save for himself. He strode into the room of relics and held his ear close to the nine-bell frame. The bells were still vibrating. The player had vanished in split seconds, as though the light which had vanquished the darkness had erased the player. It was uncanny, but Dorus Noel was accustomed to Oriental eeriness.

He whirled back into his bedroom. His face was grim and hard as he stared at the knife which had been driven a good two inches into the wall. The blade was of slender, tempered steel, razor sharp. The haft was a golden dragon with beady eyes of polished red coral, gruesomely and marvelously carved. The tongue of the dragon, red as blood, licked out at him as though it were alive. Noting the color scheme of the knife Noel knew one thing at once; it had come from some treasure house of imperial relics. Whence? Peking? Jehol?

The Mukden Palaces?

When he answered that he would know why this attempt was being made upon him. Why hadn't he been stabbed in his sleep? That question must wait, too. Chinese were not prone to direct action. What did all this queer stuff presage? His excitement mounted to fever pitch. This sort of thing was his element, the reason of his appointment to Chinatown. He lifted his hand to the knife, thought better of it, dropped his hand without touching the weapon. One never could tell about Chinese weapons.

He went to the front door of his dwelling and found his alarm-giving instruments intact. No windows had been forced, doors were still locked. How had the would-be slayer, and the bell ringer, entered and escaped?

He opened the front door. Outside on Mott street a meager after-midnight crowd, mostly Chinese, walked along the sidewalk. They all seemed furtive, withdrawing their eyes from him as he stared. He stepped into his bedroom and dressed. Fifteen minutes later he was in a telephone booth on Lafayette street, calling a number on Park Avenue—that of a police official, the one who had secretly commissioned him to work in Chinatown. A sleepy voice answered.

"Noel. What did you expect to develop in Chinatown that you didn't tell me?"

"What do you mean?" There, was excitement in the voice.

NOEL guardedly, in a low voice, related what had happened.

"Ah," said the voice on Park Avenue, "we've been expecting something—nobody guessed what. Those musical instruments, Noel. Have you any idea who might have sent them? And tell me this: are they decorated in any way?"

"Yes," he said, "the frame of the nine bells is hung with faded yellow tassels. I should have known the whole shipment belonged to some collection. But I won't be able to ask Sang Chiu until morning. But what does it mean?"

"Any idea how much duty would have to be paid on even a small portion of the imperial treasure from Peking, Jehol, or the Mukden Palaces?"

Noel whistled.

"I only know that an American millionaire once offered four million dollars for the relics belonging to Ch'ien Lung—most colorful Manchu Emperor. There were nine Manchu emperors. They

had treasure in all three places. If some huge smuggling syndicate...."

"Exactly. And millions in duty would be saved if some way were found...."

"I get it. Weighing human life against millions makes human life damn' cheap. I'll be getting back."

"Need help?"

"No. This is my job. I know Chinks better than most. Any help would merely hinder. But if I'm not heard from in thirty-six hours...."

"The police will turn Chinatown upside down! Good night."

"Good night!"

NOEL clicked up the receiver. Racing back toward his house, just off the dogleg where Mott and Pell streets cross, he came up standing when a wild scream rang through all Chinatown. It came from his house. Passing Chinese paused, looking affrightedly over their shoulders, then hurried on about their nocturnal business without looking back.

"They know!" said Noel to himself. "They know!"

He dashed into his house. The lights were still on. His heavy footfalls sagged the floor as he ran, shaking the bells in the room of the frame. The bells jangled musically. He did not pause. He entered the bedroom.

Sprawling on the floor beside his bed was a Chinese. It was Sang Chiu, his servant. His face was a twisted mask. His right hand clasped the haft of the knife Noel had left sticking in the wall. There was blood on the ball of his right thumb. The ruby tongue of the dragonhaft was moist with that blood.

"There, but for more luck than brains," thought Noel, "lies Dorus Noel."

He looked about him. The receiver of his telephone was down. He placed it to his ear. The operator was saying exasperatedly:

"Number please! Number please!"

Noel barked into the transmitter.

"What number was called from here just now?"

"You called...."

She repeated a number. It was that of a house on the Bowery, in which Sang Chiu had his lodgings. Somebody, in Noel's absence, had called Sang Chiu back to the house to be slain. Why?

"Who called?" snapped Noel.

"Didn't you? The voice sounded the same."

Noel, swearing, clicked up the receiver. Somebody had spoken with his voice so well that even cunning Sang had been fooled—to his death. Who could possibly do that? The Cricket? He was dead. Or was he? That touch of the bells was so like Chu Chul, the Cricket.

Noel closed the outer door and sat down in the bedroom, near the body of Sang Chiu, to think it out. Somewhere in his brain, which could think in the Oriental fashion from long practice, he must find the answer, else he would be joining Sang Chiu.

Who had called Sang Chiu? How had the unknown known what number to call? Noel himself had not called it three times since Sang had been his servitor. Sang had seemed as faithful as only Chinese can be faithful. That face told the story, Oriental poison. The kind didn't matter. There were many, all terrible. Noel lifted his eyes and stiffened.

The light in the room of the bells had gone out. Pitch darkness had taken its place. Anything or anybody could be out there now, looking in at him without fear of detection. A knife man could slay him in a second. But for a second he did not move. How could he? The bells were chiming—again—those nine bells of the scale!

And a new sound was added to the chiming of the bells, the low, muted, sighing sound of music on the twenty-four resonance tubes. The playing was expert, though Noel knew that probably not two persons in Chinatown could play the difficult instrument shaped like a teapot.

With a savage oath Noel dashed to the door again, taking a chance on a second knife. This stuff was irritating. While his fingers searched for the light button outside the door, his eyes tried to accustom themselves to the darkness in the room of the bells. Maybe his eyes played tricks on him, but he could have sworn he saw two white ghostly figures, there by the frame of the bells. Even as he watched, the chiming of the bells began to die, the muted sighs of the tubes to diminish. The two white figures began to fold in upon themselves, growing smaller. When the light went on the room was empty. The table was between Noel and the bells. The "teapot" was on the table.

It was warm to Noel's touch. Other hands had just relinquished it. He studied the table, the floor about it. There was a carpet runner, a thick one, on which the table sat. The runner extended several feet beyond either end of the table. It was drawn taut and held solidly in place by the table's

ponderous legs.

"Hell!" he said. "I wonder...lots of things...and why has nobody investigated the scream Sang Chiu gave when he died? It's because the Chinese *know*. They're in league, or scared stiff of whatever is behind all this hocus-pocus."

What was something or somebody trying to do to him, or get from him? His life had twice been spared, and that might have been design. If so, why? For what purpose was he being saved?

FOUR hours remained of the night. He decided he would know the answer before morning. He'd find it if he had to tear his own house down. But he could use help. Should he use police? That would attract too much attention. They couldn't go anywhere without a wailing of sirens, and they tried to run things, and knew little or nothing about Chinese. He was out on the street, intent upon calling his superior again, when he came to a decision. He turned back. He hadn't been out of the house five minutes.

But Sang Chiu's body had vanished!

"What the hell?" he asked himself. "Is someone reading my mind? Does someone watch every move I make, even anticipate it? They, or he, or it, waited for me to go out and moved the body. If I don't find it I can't enter a murder charge against anybody, even though I find out who did it. Now, here we are: bells ring, I appear, they stop...and there's nobody around. Crazy! Nobody enters or leaves the house by the usual way; yet somebody must have entered to ring the bells and play the resonance tubes—two somebodies, since they were played at the same time, an obvious impossibility for one person. Everything took place right here in this room."

Anything might happen in the Chinese room, where Noel kept all his relics of the Orient. His own collection, on which he had paid full duty, was worth many thousands of dollars. The addition of the musical instruments had made it almost priceless. One relic was a clock which sounded the hour by dropping a gold ball down a staircase which circled the works of the high clock. This phenomenon could be seen because the clock was encased in glass. Now, as Noel looked at the clock, the gold ball came forth from a hole and rolled down the steps, making a thumping, musical sound. It was three in the morning.

Noel swore softly.

The secret, he felt, was in the room. Where should he begin? He remembered the two white,

ghostly figures, how they had seemed to melt away and vanish. The table must figure in it somewhere. Aiding his search with a flashlight, whose beam he played over the floor, he examined every inch of the space about the table. On the shadowed side, opposite the frame of the nine bells, he found a tiny red spot, moist to his questing finger.

"Sang Chiu went out this way. How? Was he really dead?"

Dorus Noel grasped the table and yanked it toward him. It came easily, sliding along the floor. It shook slightly and the bells set up a soft tinkling. The "teapot" fell to the floor, breaking two of the resonance tubes, thus reducing the value of the ancient instrument by hundreds of dollars. Noel swore.

The thick runner under the table had parted, separating into three pieces. It had been one piece when he had bought it, weeks before; now it was in three. The two ends were twisted up under the legs of the table, where they had been dragged askew. The central piece, covering the area under the table, remained in place. The points of separation were sharply defined, as though the runner had been cut with a razor.

Noel whistled softly. His eyes were bright as coals. His nostrils quivered like those of an eager hunting dog.

He thrust an automatic into his belt, dropped extra flashlight batteries into his pocket, stood for a long moment looking down at the central piece of runner. He dropped to his knees and grasped the piece. It was solidly affixed to the floor! He thrust the flashlight into his pocket, freeing both hands, tugged at the carpet. The floor shook as he tugged. The bells tinkled. The piece of runner was rising as he tugged, bringing with it a section of his floor!

"The unmitigated gall of the dogs!" he muttered.

When he had lifted the runner as far as possible, he thrust the leg of the table over the black gaping hole which was thus exposed, to hold the trapdoor up. A flight of stairs led down into abysmal darkness. Up came a musty odor, mingled with that of fresh earth. Some of the black cavern was old, some of it new. It probably hid many secrets. It hid, he was sure, the secret of the two white figures and the playing of the bells. What else?

At the last moment he decided against leaving the trapdoor open. He wasn't one to back out of anything he had started. Leaving a way of exit seemed to indicate he expected defeat at the hands

of the unknown. He'd never admit that.

He lowered the door, sat for a moment in darkness at the head of the stairs. Then he started moving down the steps, inching his way, feeling with his feet, automatic in one hand, flashlight in the other. Lifted elbows told him a dirt wall was close on either side. He went down what he judged to be about thirty feet—and as he went he thought how simple it had been for his baiters to spend, literally, hours at the head of those steps, trapdoor raised a fraction of an inch, so they could listen to every sound. He encountered hardpacked earth and the end of the stairs.

FINGERS on the nib of the flashlight, he stood erect—and out of the darkness came flailing arms to fasten themselves about his neck. A heavy body fell against him. His finger closed over the trigger of his automatic, but he did not pull it, for instantly realization had come to him. There was no life in those flailing arms. The hands against his face were cold.

He knew he had walked straight into Sang Chiu, who, for some diabolical reason, had been placed in his pathway, suspended in such fashion, probably by a cord which exactly held the dead man's weight, that it would fall when he walked into it. Simple and horrible and rather like a game!

Like a game!

Noel gasped as the three words kept playing through his mind. Could it be possible that—but no, it couldn't be what he had suddenly begun to suspect. It was too fantastic.

He had dropped his flashlight. He felt around for it with his foot. He found it, snicked it on, turned the beam on the face of the dead man. Yes, it was Sang Chiu, the twisted expression which had been on his face when he died, still there but slowly fading as such expressions do when the body cools.

There was no sound in the place. The strange odor still persisted, now with a new, pungent odor added, the odor of opium. And it came to him he had smelled that odor earlier today. It was not new to him—nor to anyone who knew China. Noel's lips twisted. His eyes were large in the darkness, gleaming behind the flash.

He raised his left hand, to bore the light of the flash into the blackness ahead. Instantly his hand went numb and the light flicked out. It came on the heels of a whistling sound from directly ahead—and he knew that a deadly knife had been flung with unerring accuracy. His thumb, thus jarred, had

snicked out the light when the knife struck it.

Out of the darkness ahead came a burst of rollicking laughter which brought an amazed oath from the lips of Dorus Noel. He had expected to hear, or experience anything, but never to hear laughter from beyond the grave—the laughter of Chu Chul, the Cricket! His power for evil had extended throughout the world, until Noel had caused his death. But the Cricket still lived. This laughter proved it. The power of Chu Chul seemed greater even than that of the grave, for the laughter proved that he had come back, even from there, to play again with death and match wits with Dorus Noel, his arch-enemy. There were scars on the body of Noel to prove that he had not always won in past encounters. And now. . . .

“Dorus Noel!” said a lilting voice, interrupting the laughter. “Dorus Noel! Dorus Noel! How have you been doing?”

Explosively Noel spat out the name:

“Chu Chul! I saw you die!”

“You should have embalmed the body, Dorus Noel,” came the answer. “Only so would the Cricket have been denied resurrection.”

“What do you want of me? What is the meaning of this stage-acting?”

“Stage-acting? This is very real, Dorus Noel. Have you ever known the Cricket to play at life and death?”

“No, but there is always the first time. What do you want of me?”

“YOU will know presently. You stand well with police officials. You can do anything with them. You can approach any of them, and all have their price if properly approached. With you to act for me I can manage everything and still save millions, even though we make some of the highest officials rich.”

“Bribery?” Noel spat the word as though it were alum in his mouth.

Again a burst of pagan laughter.

“What difference does it make? Money spells success.”

“Why did you use the bells as a means of contact?”

“Rather intriguing, weren’t they? I knew your love for old Chinese things. I could not very well have approached you openly. You might have been frightened, thinking me a ghost. . . .”

“And wanting you for murder!” snapped Noel, trying to peer into the darkness, striving to make out the form of the speaker. He sensed that

the speaker was not alone, that the whole darkness ahead was filled with menacing forms.

“Precisely!” the unseen one’s English was perfect, without a trace of accent. But the Cricket spoke many languages. Now he confounded Noel by a brazen piece of mimicry:

“Hello! Hello! Is this Worth 2-1474? I wish to speak to Sang Chiu.”

Noel did not speak, but that voice was his own—and it came from the blackness ahead—followed by a chuckle which broke into the pagan laughter of the Cricket.

“You’ve been keeping close tabs on me, Chu Chul,” said Noel, edging forward in the darkness. “There’s another murder to be chalked up against you. Why didn’t that knife hit me in the beginning?”

“It was not so intended. I knew by the height whence your voice came that you were stooped over. My knife man could have got you if I had wished.”

“And the poison on the haft?”

“I knew you too well to think you would touch the knife. I wanted someone else to die by that poison, to prove to you that the Cricket still has power.”

“What do you propose?”

“A partnership. It is worth millions of dollars to you and you can have it in your hands in ten days.”

“How?”

FOR a moment there was no answer. Then blinding light flashed in the face of Noel. It showed him Sang Chiu, at his feet. It also showed him a huge room, packed and crammed with treasures in aged bronze, porcelain, cloisonne and jade, especially jade, all of it of the deepest, flawless green. There were ancient brocades in piles on priceless Ming tables. There were screens of lacquer, paintings by ancient and brilliant artists. There were yellow robes worth fortunes in themselves because they had been worn by emperors. There were ancient weapons studded with gems. Thousands of dollars could not have purchased the least of them. From somewhere among the rabbit warrens of Chinatown all this smuggled wealth had been transported to the vast storehouse under Dorus Noel’s dwelling place because Chu Chul had been sure that even Noel had his price.

“Your proposal?” Noel’s voice was strange and harsh, scarcely his own. That treasure, so

utterly priceless, had gripped his throat and his imagination.

"That you fix things with customs officials and with the police, using money without stint, that you contact men with millions enough to buy these things. I know you can, for you are as much at home on Park Avenue as Chinatown. When all have been sold there are still other ways of making money."

"Yes?" Noel's blood was boiling. That such gorgeous things should be used for such base purposes made him cold with abysmal fury. "How?"

"We can force yet other millions from purchasers for silence as to the circumstances of purchase...after which we can cause the things to be confiscated by the customs officials and turned back to us. The possibilities are endless."

"The answer," said Dorus Noel, "is no. What are you going to do about it?"

Chu Chul laughed.

"Kill you, if you don't change your mind. Someone else will be found who will help us. It's merely a matter of time, and selection. Perhaps the man whose number is..." here Chu Chul spoke the number of Noel's superior on Park Avenue..."would listen to a proposal, provided he believed that by so doing he could secure the return, unharmed, of Dorus Noel! He'd have to trust my emissaries. He wouldn't know until too late that you were dead. Then he would not dare speak because he would be too deeply involved."

"The answer is still no!" said Noel harshly. "Let's get on with the business, whatever it is."

His automatic lifted, spouting flame and bullets toward the spot whence the voice of the Cricket had come. He heard bullets slam into bronze vases, giving off golden chimes, oddly like the ringing of the nine bells. He heard pieces of porcelain smash to the floor as the light which had shown him the wealth of the world went out. Then a high wind of hurricane strength seemed to possess this underground treasure vault—and Dorus Noel knew that the minions of Chu Chul were being vomited forth from every secret door and panel, charging in to destroy him.

Now his life *was* forfeit, but he laughed aloud as he waited, loving a fight for its own sake. Bodies crashed against him with a shock. He pressed the muzzle of his automatic against them and pulled the trigger. The odor of blood and burned flesh was in his nostrils. He pulled trigger, released it, pulled again—and again—and yet

again.

Blows rained upon his head. He used the muzzle of his automatic when bullets failed him, striking savage, bitter blows designed to rip through scalp and skull. His left hand wielded his flashlight. It became bent and broken in his hand.

"Why don't you mix in, Chu Chul?" he shouted. "I would give my life to have my hands at your throat when I died!"

Came the laughter of Chu Chul, ahead in the darkness—and the laughter was filled with glee. Chu Chul also liked a fight, as long as he personally were not in it. Noel was borne deeper into the vault by sheer press of numbers. His feet, as hands grabbed at him, lifted him, swung him about, collided with precious vases which rolled to the floor, breaking with musical explosions.

The stinking Chinese were all over him. He could feel the queues on their heads, coiled like serpents. He could smell their sour sweat, feel the grease on their oily bodies, proof that they were *ta chuen* men, trained fighters. The odds against him were heavy. But he knew something of *ta chuen*, Chinese *jujitsu*, himself. He fought like a tiger, glad that the press of bodies was too heavy for the enemy to use knives with success.

HE did a strange thing. He saved one bullet and it wasn't for himself. He knew who it was for, and he prayed a little as he fought. He had a use for that last bullet, if ever a chance were given him. Even death should not cheat him. If it did...then New York City would be in the hands of a smuggling ring, whose machinations would shake the very foundations of the land. Its tentacles would reach into the homes of the rich and from them into Wall Street, into rich banks, into every home where there was money. It would be a sweeping, catastrophic thing.

"Give me a chance, Chu Chul," said Dorus Noel, shouting, his voice panting, spent. "There are so many against me. Let me have light by which to fight."

Out of the darkness came the laughter of Chu Chul, then swift commands in Cantonese, which were answered by the coolies who were fighting Dorus Noel.

Said Chu Chul: "Are you strong enough to handle this foolish American? He asks for lights."

"Give him lights," said a coolie hoarsely. "We too need them, for he is hard as nails, and slippery, and we hamper one another in the darkness."

The lights snapped on. Noel paused in the

fight for a brief second to stare at the figure, standing apart and some distance away, alone. Chu Chul, in the robes of an emperor; Chu Chul with the two parallel bars on his forehead, crossed by a transversal which was the Chinese character for "wong," meaning "ruler." The egotism of the man!

A heavy blow smashed against the back of Noel's head. He felt himself falling. He fought to keep his right hand clasped about the butt of his automatic. He slid down among the close-pressing bodies, strength pouring out of him. But his eyes never left the face of Chu Chul, who, grinning with delight, was advancing toward the heart of the conflict.

Noel was down, and heavy feet were trampling him.

"Secure him!" snapped the Cricket.

For a second the coolies, huge North Chinese, held their hands, stepping back, looking down, deciding how to obey the order. Noel rolled to his stomach. His eyes were on that birthmark on the head of Chu Chul. His right hand swung into position as Chu Chul, noting how he had been trapped, uttered a thin cry. All eyes turned toward the master at the cry—just in time to see a black hole appear in the very center of that birthmark, as Noel's automatic barked savagely.

Screaming once, tottering, fighting to remain erect, but with eyes already glassy, dead even as he stood, Chu Chul sagged at the knees and fell forward on his face.

"How," said Noel hoarsely, as the coolies stood, stunned, "can you keep out of the hands of police when you no longer have the brains of the master to instruct you?"

He spoke to them in the dialect of Tientsin...and cries of fear broke from the leaderless coolies. The lights went out...and there

was the pattering sound of racing feet as the erstwhile minions of Chu Chul ran for safety, driven by fear of consequences, now without a leader who had brains.

Dorus Noel staggered to his feet. He felt in his pocket for matches as he moved through the darkness toward the sprawled body of Chu Chul. He lighted a match and looked down into the face. It was an expressive face. In its time it had expressed many things, including the emotions of others.

"I saw Chu Chul die," said Noel hoarsely, looking at the dead. "I was sure he was dead. I was just as sure that he had many lieutenants who were not dead, who would try to take his place. I scarcely expected that the next move would be made on Park Avenue. It was a tough break that I was invited this afternoon—or rather yesterday afternoon. You were a good actor, Mei Ying! You'd have made your millions honestly if you had wanted to...all society was at your feet. Yes, you should have stuck to acting, for you were good...even the voice of Chu Chul was perfect...but you should have made yourself a birthmark that wouldn't smear!"

The words had hardly left his mouth when the crackling of weird laughter filled the tunnel. Again and again it came like a wave receding and breaking in on the shore.

It was the voice of the real Chu Chul!

"A wise man, my dear Noel, has servants to act in his place, if he would live long." Again a crescendo of laughter filled the tunnel.

"We shall meet again. I shall send you more presents. Until then..."

The laughter and all sound died out, leaving Noel standing there in black silence.