

Emperor Blackmail

By Steve Fisher

“Red-eyes” Mark Turner, Honolulu detective captain, thought he was hard-boiled enough to blast a lovely young girl’s faith in life—just to convict his man.

MARK TURNER could see that the wild-eyed kid in front of him was a resident of the islands. And he judged by the immaculate quality of her white silk dress that she was probably worth money.

Her greenish eyes were wide. She was damned frightened—anyone could see that. She had bitten her lips until they were creased and red from blood marks.

“I tell you that you must do something!” she pleaded. “It isn’t right. Warren has been the confidential secretary to my father, and now he is being held by Su Low. They intend to murder him. I know they do!”

Mark Turner, captain of Honolulu detectives, was a huge, well-built figure. He had bright red hair and a crisp red Vandyke beard. The contrast of this coloring, along with the protruding high cheekbones in his face, made his somber eyes as red as glowing coals.

“I can’t understand what you are so excited about,” Turner drawled. “Your father doesn’t seem to want to make any charges.”

“But father thinks that Warren was implicated in something concerning Su Low. Warren wasn’t. It is all very absurd.” Her words were suddenly chopped short. She leaned on the desk, and her long hair caressed her lovely slim shoulders. “How do you know who my father is?”

Mark Turner grinned. He pulled a case of cigarettes from his drawer, put one of the smokes in his mouth and lit up. “Easy,” he replied. “You’re young enough



They were on Turner before he could see them.

to be a deb, but you aren’t a visitor from the mainland. You’ve been here in Hawaii

for a while. I am assuming that you are important because you are well dressed and rather demanding in what you want. If you were a resident of Honolulu society I should know you. Since I *don't* know you, you must live on the island of Maui with your pineapple-plantation-owning father."

"You're right," she snapped; "but if you think this turning Sherlock on me is doing any good, you've got another guess coming. I'm not sane-minded enough to appreciate such a feat of mental deducing. What I want you to do is—"

"—Rescue your boy friend."

Her small ears became crimson, her green eyes hard. "He is *not* that. He was just an employee of my father, and I am too much of a human being to see any innocent person ruthlessly killed."

Mark Turner stroked his Vandyke. He glanced down at the rather clumsy dragon's-head ring the girl wore on her middle finger.

"I suppose that you're wearing his ring just for good luck?"

She stared hard and long. Her lower lip quivered a little, and then she broke down. "All right!" She glanced about, saw a chair and seated herself in it. "I'm in love with him. So what? I tell you he's straight. A clean, honest boy—"

Turner laughed cruelly. "He's one of the rottenest rats in Honolulu."

She was up again, her small fists tight. "He *isn't* that! Oh, I know the story. You know it too. He was left in China as a baby and brought up under Su Low's care. But he's a white man, remember that, even though his whole life was spent learning the Oriental customs and believing the Oriental beliefs. He was made to be a white Chinese, so to speak. He was educated so that Su Low could use him later in concocting his shady schemes; so he could be used as a wedge to get blackmail letters from rich people. So he

could get society women to gamble in the Chinese casinos—"

TURNER put out his cigarette. The girl was serious. The detective knew Warren all right. He was a white "Wu" in the line-up as far as the police were concerned. Although Warren was a square-shouldered young man with vivid black hair and snapping dark eyes, Turner had always considered him as a white rat, because Su Low used him as just that. But the girl was in deadly earnest. She wanted action. Turner wasn't one to spurn a girl's tearful plea; and besides, he had been wanting a legitimate excuse to clamp down on Su Low for a long time.

"I know all about his past," the girl went on hysterically, "but can't you see that it is all due to his raising? He was made to learn everything Chinese. He was hardly conscious of the fact that he was of white heritage. Then he came to work for father, edged into that job. At first he gave Su Low the information he wanted to blackmail father, and then as Warren and I became friends, he ceased doing this."

Turner got up and strapped on his automatic. His reddish eyes were still on the girl, who looked very small in the large chair, talking for all she was worth:

"So I forgave him. I love him, that's why I did it. Don't you think that a man like Warren could change himself completely for love? Don't you think—"

"If he were in love," Turner said dryly.

"But he is in love! Don't you think that I know?"

"I hope you do. Your father's name is Lowell. What do they call you around home?"

"Ellen."

"All right, Ellen. Is the story like this? Warren worked for you, fell in love and refused to give Su Low further information. Su Low captured him and

took him back to the lairs they have and is intending either to win him back to his will or kill him?"

Ellen nodded her pretty head vigorously. She got out of her chair, her eyes full of admiration. "Gee," she breathed, "in spite of what I said about that Sherlock stuff, I've got to hand it to you. You know what you're doing, all right."

Turner gripped her hand. "Go on back to your island plantation. I'll see what I can do."

"Go back?" Ellen laughed nervously. Turner couldn't help thinking that she looked like a poppy when her cheeks reddened as they did now. "I'm never going back! Never, see? I'm through with all that. *I'm* changed too. I used to be a little hell-cat around the place. A tomboy who rode horses, acted half savage, and took life as it came. Dad didn't I think I'd ever fall in love. And now he—"

"—Is sore because you love Warren, and he thinks Warren is a crook. And he's griped, too, because you are in love at all. So you up and pulled out, and you've probably got a room at the Morris Hotel where he'll find you just as soon as he wants you."

Ellen's greenish eyes were wide with amazement.

Captain Mark Turner rubbed his red beard and grinned knowingly. "You're an all-right kid," he told her. "I admire your grit. You seem to know what you want and make no bones about getting it. I suppose you even want to accompany me down to Su Low's dens—"

"Will you?"

"No. That's out." His voice had a harsh ring of finality. "But don't go back to that Morris Hotel."

He thought a moment. He knew he was a damn fool to let himself become so sentimentally concerned about a crazy girl who had fallen in love with a questionable

young man. But hell! A guy couldn't help getting worked up over Ellen's sincerity. Besides that, it was a hot night, and the detective captain's trigger finger felt just a bit itchy.

"No, don't return to the hotel," he repeated. "I don't advise that." He pulled out a card. "Here, take this to the Mama Sans on Beretania and tell her 'Red Eyes' sent you. She'll give you the whole place if you want it. You'll be safe there until I get in touch with you."

There was a mist over Ellen's lovely eyes. "I don't know how to thank you," she said huskily.

Turner bit his lip. "Then don't thank me," he replied. He edged her toward the door, because he could see that she was going to begin crying pretty quickly, and he certainly didn't want that.

CHINATOWN looked eerie. Mark Turner's sure and even steps slapped along the sidewalk ominously. His quiet breathing lent an extra hush to the night. The street was medium-sized. Most of the Korean barber shops were still open, and the slim, slant-eyed females, who were artists at trimming beards—such as his red one—were leaning sleepily against the door-jambs. There were Chinese inscriptions on a lot of windows, but most of the light and noise came from upstairs joints. From those upper windows, gay little banners waved, with crazy black Chinese marks on them; and music that sounded like it was ground from a broken-down hurdy-gurdy shrilled out into the night air.

Su Low controlled a lot of territory, and Turner knew it. He had always wanted to crack down on him, but the rest of the department had disliked the idea. The times when they had dragged the astute Oriental in, they had been made laughing matters of in the two daily papers. To

venture alone into Su Low's quarters meant perhaps a bullet in the heart, a knife in the side, or a slim silk rope about his thick neck. Any pleasant little thing could be expected, from the death of a thousand tortures to the bleeding of his ears until he'd burst from the pain.

That was why he was crazy. He had allowed his secret brooding to "get" Su Low, and the girl's urgent requests, to swing him into a move that was practically certain to be disastrous. And yet, this way of attacking was the only way he would be liable to stumble upon evidence concrete enough to put the yellow master of Honolulu's evil away for a while.

But "Red Eyes" Turner was that way. As silly as a lunatic at times, but thus far he had managed to keep all of his ribs and both of his arms and both of his legs. So he was lucky. Perhaps he would be lucky again.

He swung down a dark and musty back alley. Pantry boys were emptying stale chop suey into garbage cans. A black cat skirted his path. Thunder clapped in the sky, but summer thunder in Honolulu, and summer rain, meant nothing.

He turned suddenly and went up to the rear entrance of the Morris Hotel. Opening the screen door, he stepped inside. There was a hallway that lead on into the hotel. To his right there was a portal to a "closet." Turner knew that it wasn't a closet at all. It was a room into which one went, to get down into the exotic gambling rooms of the wary Su Low.

Jerking out his automatic, he stepped to the door and tried it. An eye-panel slid back. Immediately a voice rasped:

"Red Eyes!"

As if it had been a signal, Turner crashed forward with his bulky weight. The lock splintered. The detective arrived inside in time to see a trapdoor, which led below, close. He jerked it back open and

descended the steps quickly.

He jammed his gun into the back of a Chinaman. Another portal slid open. Turner smashed his way inside. He stared then, all but transfixed at the scene before him.

It was a room of golden radiance. A rich yellow rug was on the floor. Tapestries adorned every wall. Black and red furniture in the lowest, most modernistic design was about, and in the center there were large gambling tables. Casino, roulette, dice blocks.

Well-dressed men and women were standing about. Crooks, all of them. The kind of crooks that Turner couldn't touch. Sneaking into low Chinese dives to have their money taken away from them; disobeying the law so they could get robbed.

For a moment Turner stood swaying on the flat of his feet. His red eyes were burning balls of hatred. The heavy automatic wavered in his right hand. The veins stood out on his forehead.

"Out," he rasped. "All of you get out."

The snooty society-club people bolted for the exits. Turner swept by them and went into the next room. This one was the same as the first. Turner kept on. He came into a small room in which only men were allowed. There were expensive couches on which rich customers slept, doped with damnable poppy fumes.

But Turner had known that he would see all this, and he cared little about it. There was no evidence in it—not enough that could be proved afterward. Hell, hadn't he dragged testimony out of people to prove that real opium was used, and that the gambling was for keeps, only to have babbling lawyers twist his statements and infer that he had a personal grudge against Su Low? They had said that these dives were but "quaint places with Chinese atmosphere" for the tourists, and that in

spite of appearances, nothing was genuine.

Suddenly Turner saw a blade flash across the room. He twisted, and his automatic roared. Simultaneous with the shot came a shrill gong that pierced through each room.

A crowd of Chinamen rushed at Turner and were on him before he could see half of them.

The next thing he knew, the automatic was out of his hand and he was being dragged. He kept telling himself that he was going to get out of everything, and he was going to get this kid Warren out too, if there *was* anything straight about him. Ellen had been so sincere that she had convinced him that there was. And if he could get hold of something valuable in Su Low's office, where he would be taken, he'd clamp the lid on this thing in spite of the big money and "names" that kept it protected.

HE was released in Su Low's office. The walls of this were done entirely in black; the rug was of the same color. Everything was black, in fact, except the grinning little Chinaman sitting behind the ebony desk, his stained yellow teeth gleaming in the light from the lamp.

"Honorable detective come to pay humble Su Low one more visit?"

"Quit the kidding," Turner barked. "I came down to get you to release Warren. I know he turned traitor on you. You had it coming to you."

It was all bluff, but everybody was a *little* afraid of the law, at least.

So Low's grin vanished. His tight yellow face became an evil mask. "Honorable detective puts his nose in too far. You are through, Mark Turner. In China that means—"

"We are in Honolulu, and I am the law!"

"This is my China," Su Low squeaked.

"Everything your red eyes glance upon here is mine." He chuckled. "You can be killed, your body buried in quick lime, your bones put in a River Street cess flood, and all will be forgotten."

"That's just your version of it, Su Low. But you're crazy as hell, see? You can't kill me. You haven't the guts. You're not as good as you think you are. Warren turned rat on you, didn't he? If that kid wasn't afraid of you, do you think that *I* am?"

"White fool speaks too hastily," Su Low said in anger. He rose to his feet. Turner could see in the shadows behind that he was covered by the guns of Chinese henchmen. "Su Low is all that he says he is. By the power of my most honorable and almighty ancestors, Mr. Red Eyes, you shall die tonight!"

"Warren crossed you," Turner gritted. He was losing his bluff and there'd have to be a helluva fight pretty quickly. He knew that. "If he can beat you, so can I!"

"Crawling reptile! Simpering snake!" Su Low hissed. He jerked open a drawer and waved some papers in front of Turner's face. "A signed statement in full about Warren's love affair with Miss Ellen Lowell. Letters from her contained here, too. A complete blackmail plan. It is all here. Call that a double-cross, honorable moron?"

"Lie, you dog!" Turner shot back, getting his teeth into the thing. He had awakened Su Low's anger which was a rare and hard thing to do. He had to follow it up now, just as a prizefighter follows up with a second good blow after the first. "Lie like the stinking, stupid, withered old man that you are! Those papers—"

Su Low laid them out on the desk. Turner stared down. The Chinaman had been telling the truth all right. Warren had used the girl's love for a blackmail plot! And she had been so sure of his love and

his willingness to do the right thing.

Turner lost control of himself in that moment. That was why he was possessed of a greater strength than he had ever known before. He was suddenly a ruthless, bitter and maddened savage, crazed for this devil's blood!

He snatched up the papers and a knife, which lay on the desk as an ornament.

Bullets roared out from the partly hidden guns behind Su Low. Turner grabbed the little Chinaman and held him in front of him.

Su Low was fighting like a demon but just one of Turner's mighty arms was enough to hold him.

"Shoot some more, you fools, and you'll shoot Su Low!"

There were no more shots. Su Low struggled desperately, but he was no match for the detective captain. With his red eyes afire, and his flaming Vandyke looking more satanic than ever, Turner demanded:

"Bring in Warren!"

There was hesitation. Turner stayed his ground. He had his back to a solid wall and he was still holding Su Low in front of him. Su Low gave a moaning command in Chinese.

Presently a thin young man came into the room.

Turner wasted no time. His hard eyes surveyed the lad. He saw the grim lines about the mouth; the deceiving eyes that had intrigued an innocent girl.

"Shoot him down!" Turner barked, holding the knife at the back of Su Low's neck. "Shoot him through the head or I'll kill Su Low!"

The slim youth began trembling. Sweat beaded over his high forehead. His eyes got shifty. He made a bolt for the door. Two Chinamen grabbed him.

Turner whispered quickly into Su Low's ear. "Want me to kill you here, dog? If you think I won't do it, you're

guessing wrong as hell."

Su Low gave the order to kill Warren without hesitation. The action had completely unnerved the old man's Oriental stoicism.

"Let me live!" Warren screeched in a high voice. "Let me live!" He was slobbering now. His eyes were bulging out. His face was strained and white.

Suddenly he fell to his knees. He was pleading, gibbering, laughing and crying.

"Shoot him," Mark Turner said evenly.

There was a shot. Blood spurted from Warren's forehead. His face ghastly, he pitched forward.

"All right, Su Low," Turner said, "you and I are getting out of this place, and if there's any funny stuff there'll be a heap of Chinese bones in one corner and a lot of blood and brains against the wall!"

"**B**UT you can't do it!" the District Attorney roared madly. "Do you realize the names you will have to involve? Do you know how much money there is behind this? I tell you, we've got to release Su Low on bond right now!"

"I've listened to you too damned long," Mark Turner said acidly, extracting a cigarette from his case and tapping it on his mahogany desk. "As Su Low told me, I'm through. Through listening to you and a lot of other people around here, see? I'm keeping Su Low behind bars. Got the governor's okay on it, and if you don't like it, you can—"

"But the case will be absurd in court, just like the last one. You have no proof for your statements. And if this turns out to be a foul ball too, you're *through* all right!"

Turner's red eyes had a peculiar gleam in them. "So my reputation is at stake, is it? Well, so what, you big baboon? I have the evidence I need this time. I don't have to have you to tell me that it has to be

good evidence. And I don't want to listen to your jabbering that the papers are riding me and calling me crazy. Su Low stays in jail until this court trial opens!"

The D.A. shrugged. "I'm sure they'll run you the hell out of town on a rail!" He jammed on his hat and left the office.

Turner sat gazing at his burning cigarette. As the smoke swirled upward he realized that he was a stubborn fool, trying to go against politics for the right of law. But he had the goods now. He had risked his life to get the goods last night, and hell, he'd use every shred of evidence—

The door of the office opened. Turner's heart sank. This was something he had not considered. Ellen Lowell walked in. Her face was white, chalk-white. Her soft hair was still down about her shoulders. She wore black—a lovely mourner, she was.

"They killed him before you could help him, didn't they?" she asked in a strained voice, coming over to the desk.

Turner ducked out his cigarette. He got up and came around the desk. He took Ellen's hand; it was very soft. He tried to speak to her but found he couldn't. His mouth was hot and dry. He stared down at her sweet beauty. Of course, she didn't know about that double-cross. It was Turner's ace in the hole for the trial. He was keeping mum about it.

He didn't want to say what he had done. But he couldn't help it, talking to the girl like this. She was a "right" kid all right, and there wasn't any getting around that.

She looked up at him, her babyish face soft, tender. "But Warren died thinking of me, I hope," she managed. "He was like that. I'll bet he died bravely and proudly. Stood right up and took his medicine."

There was an ugly picture in Turner's mind. It was that of a slobbering idiot down on his knees, gibbering for his life.

"After we discovered our love," Ellen went on in a trembling voice, "he changed so much. He was so straight and staunch and loyal. I shall always adore that in him. How wonderful he was—"

A tear trickled across her cheek.

The hard detective with the red Vandyke turned away. He glanced toward the window. His voice was hollow and dry. "Yeah, you're right, kid. Warren stood up, and when they burned him down he said—"

"Yes?" Her voice was pitifully eager.

It was no use. Turner couldn't let her know. "He told them to tell you that he loved you, Ellen, dear—even in death!"

She breathed deeply. A radiance flushed from her cheeks. She went to the window, and then turned about. Her lips were firm, her green eyes steady.

"This," she said, "is the one thing in my life that means something. I'll go back now and be a tomboy and a savage again. No more love for me." Her eyes softened. "So he said that even in death—" She burst into tears. Choking back sobs, she concluded: "He was so wonderful! So *darned* grand!" She ran from the room.

MARK TURNER sat down a moment. He was too dazed to think coherently. Evidence! Newspapers laughing! Running out of town! Railed out! Fruitless years of detective work in Honolulu all powdered to hell now for a statement a dying coward didn't make!

He got up and went to the window again. His red eyes stared out into the street. Was it worth it all? Was her love and life worth more than his reputation, his job? Of course it wasn't. She was just a kid and she had a lot of life before her. The romance was her own fault; she should have listened to her father. Turner would send the evidence in, the papers that would reveal the truth about Warren to

her. Sure, he would, because he wasn't a sucker to women. Not Mark Turner. Some other soft-hearted guy, maybe, but not the famous "Red Eyes" of Honolulu!

He shrugged indifferently and lit a cigarette. He was still at the window watching. What a sap he would be not to turn in the evidence! To keep it in his safe where it now was. Or to burn it up. Hell, he couldn't convict Su Low without it, and he knew he couldn't. And without it now, he couldn't remain in Honolulu as a detective captain and face the music.

Suddenly his eyes hardened. He saw the slim figure of the girl as she left the police station and climbed into the waiting automobile. Her father, a white-haired old man, was holding the door open for her. She looked very sweet and pure there in the sun.

Mark Turner threw down his cigarette and stepped on it. He crossed the room and brought out the papers he had taken from Su Low's place. Quickly, with shaking hands, he struck a match.

The ashes floated to the floor. The man with the red Vandyke and the burning eyes of a living Satan laughed hoarsely. His diabolic laughter echoed from the walls and shrieked back into his ears.

Those ashes on the floor were his ashes. He was through. All done; because his heart, which had escaped so many bullets, wasn't as hard as he thought it was.

His hands numb he picked up the phone and got the outside desk.

"Hello, sarge? Book me on the *Mahona* sailing tonight for the mainland. And tell the D.A. I was just kidding about last night. I was drunk. He can release Su Low and let him go his own stinking way."

Turner was just about to hang up when the voice of the sergeant poured excitedly over the wire to him.

"*What?*" he gasped.

"Yeah, that's right," the sergeant told him. "Su Low knew that you had the goods on him this time, and you know these Orientals—he committed suicide in his cell."

When Mark Turner was at last able to speak, he said weakly, with his voice trembling:

"Cancel those mainland reservations and get a plane to take me to Maui. I guess I'll—I'll get a little rest playing tomboy with a girl named Ellen."