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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. III, No. 1

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November, 1937

FEATURING CHARLIE CHAN, ORIENTAL SLEUTH, IN

—A Complete Mystery Novelette—

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A New CHARLIE



Charlie Chan

FEATURING
THE FAMOUS ORIENTAL
SLEUTH AS CREATED BY
**EARL DERR
BIGGERS**

in

CHARLIE CHAN

CHAPTER I NIGHT CLUB MENACE

A DEFINITELY sinister air of impending tragedy hung over the Hottentot Club, located in the Fifties just off Broadway—a spot known as one of the gayest on the main stem of the nation.

To the uninitiated the night was wild, careless and packed with



He threatened

laughs, for it was designated as "Candid Camera Night."

Everyone, in focus or out of focus, depending on the amount of sparkling wine consumed, merrily popped flashlight bulbs as they aimed their little cameras at their neighbors, at members of the orchestra and the revealing beauties who contributed their talents to the floor show. Nothing was barred as far as photographic subject matter was con-

"Murder Case Like Revolving Door—

CHAN Novelette

Written Especially for
POPULAR DETECTIVE

by EDWARD
CHURCHILL

—based on the
Twentieth Century-
Fox Production



everyone with the weaving pistol

on BROADWAY

cerned. Enthusiasts even invaded the dressing rooms and "shot" the nonchalant ladies of the ensemble.

To those who knew that the big shots gathered here—the top-flight politicians, the racketeers, the kingpins of Manhattan's illegitimate, illegal and at times murderous enterprises—there was an alarming presence at hand.

This person was an over-blond, over-brittle woman, hard beyond the

age of chorus girl freshness, who had just that afternoon arrived on the *Normandie*. In the argot of Broadway she was "hot."

"Buzz" Moran was checking his nat and topcoat when he saw her come into the Hottentot. His tight lips went tighter, his body took on the sleek expectancy of a coiled rattlesnake about to strike as he saw her.

Taut leg muscles drove him to her

When One Side Close, Other Side Open"

side. The woman turned, and started, a look of annoyance and concern on her face as she saw Manhattan's sleek, top-flight racketeer.

"When did you get back?" he clipped icily.

"Listen, Buzz, I've got a good reason for being here."

"And you got a better one for staying away. You get out of town before morning."

She could not conceal the fear in her eyes as her glance met his.

"Okay," she said, after a moment.

She headed up the stairs. Moran knew where she was going. He turned, went into the club, unmindful of the roistering, camera-flashing guests, the girls who danced on the floor. Louie, the headwaiter, showed him a table.

"GET Johnny Burke!" Moran snapped.

Louie nodded, vanished into the crowd.

Johnny Burke, owner-manager of the Hottentot, was having a good time. At his table were "Speed" Patten, the best known columnist in New York City, and pretty Joan Wendell, the girl who, with her candid camera, caught pictures which made the front pages of the New York *Bulletin*, the same sheet that Patten toiled for. They were all watching Marie Collins—beautiful Marie, with the million dollar pins—out in the front of the dancing chorines.

"Pretty sweet on her, what?" Speed Patten asked Burke, indicating Marie. He almost added, "since Billie Bronson went to Europe," but didn't.

Burke nodded.

"Me—I've got better taste," Patten said, looking at Joan. "I got a yen for the hottest shutter-clicker in the world."

Joan smiled at the compliment, patted Patten's hand with affectionate approval.

Louie came to the table, spoke a few low words to Burke. The manager got up, hurried away, without even excusing himself, his face grim.

He faced Moran at the latter's table, where the racketeer was sipping his customary glass of milk.

"What's the idea of letting Billie Bronson come back from Europe?" Moran demanded.

"I didn't." Burke's suddenly white face betrayed his emotion.

"She's in your office now."

"What!" Burke jumped up, scowling. "I'll take care of her," he promised.

"You'd better," warned Moran.

Burke caught the threat in his eyes as he spoke. He hurried away in the direction of the stairs which led to his office.

In another quarter of the club, meanwhile, an intrusion of a different sort was being made. Outside a locker room window a young Chinese lad crouched on the fire-escape. Deftly he raised the window, stepped into the locker room—and found himself facing a girl of his own race. To his great alarm, she started to scream. He placed a warning finger over his lips.

"Don't yell," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm sorry I scared you."

"What do you want?" asked the girl, who carried a cigarette tray slung to her waist by a leather strap which went around her neck.

"It's awfully important." The youth's voice was almost a whisper. "You've got to help me. You see, I'm a sort of detective. My name's Lee. My Dad is Charlie Chan, and I work with him on his biggest cases."

The girl came forward, her face showing her interest at the sound of the name of the famous Chinese detective.

"I know who *he* is," she said. "I'm Ling Tse. What are you—"

Lee smiled apologetically.

"The doorman wouldn't let me in here because I didn't have a girl with me. Too bad I didn't have you. Anyway, that's why I used the fire-escape."

"I'll do anything I can," Ling Tse offered, warming at Lee's hint of a date.

"Get me into the club, then,"

Lee pleaded. "I've got to see somebody."

"All right," she agreed. "Follow me. We'll go down the back stairs."

MARIE COLLINS had just finished her number when she met Johnny Burke in a rear hall, on his way to his office. He smiled tenderly.

"Give 'em an encore, baby," he said, as he kissed her.

"You bet."

As he moved onward, however, the smile vanished from his face and his expression grew hard, as he thought of Billie Bronson. Why had the she-devil come back to plague him? Anger took the place of wonder as he stalked into his office and found her there.

"Glad to see me?" she asked. But there was no humor in her voice.

"You're hot enough to blister."

"I don't give a damn. You've been lying to me. You said your business was rotten and that I was to stay in England. You wouldn't send me enough money to come home. But I got it. Yeah, I got it." Her eyes suddenly glittered. "There's plenty of business here tonight. You said the cops were after me and when I landed all they did was tip their hats. Who've you fallen for, Big Boy?"

"You talk too much."

"Yeah. And I think too much, too. I'm going to talk plenty."

"The boys wouldn't like it."

Billie looked him straight in the eye.

"You mean Marie Collins wouldn't like it."

"You leave her out of this!" Burke's tone was harsh. "You dirty little doublecrosser!" He sensed her intense hatred, advanced on her, and found himself facing a pistol.

"Stay away from me!" she ordered.

But Burke didn't heed her. He closed in, grabbed her wrist—

Downstairs, in the club, Speed Patten was growing very restless. His good-looking face had the tense look of a newshound sensing a story. He turned to Joan.

"Snatch some nice pictures," he said, easily. "Johnny Burke's been gone too long. Something is in the air. I'm going up and find out what's keeping him."

All through with her encore Marie Collins struggled with the same idea. She left her dressing room, went down the hall toward Johnny Burke's office. Louie, the headwaiter, blocked her.

"Where you goin', Marie?" he asked.

"Johnny's office," she said, her eyes narrowing in anger. "Why?" She tried to pass him. He again barred her way.

"He's—busy right now. You better wait."

"Oh, yeah!" She pushed him aside. "Maybe you can order the bus boys around, but not me!"

She pushed by him. Louie looked after her, frowning.

CHAPTER II

ENTER CHARLIE CHAN



CHARLIE CHAN, formally dressed, stood at the head of the horseshoe table in one of the banquet rooms at the Hotel Astor. His bland, imperturbable face revealed none of the pleasure he felt at being chosen to address the political leaders of Manhattan as well as the heads of "the city's finest." Back from Europe after solving several famous cases with his quiet, unobtrusive methods, he felt deeply honored at this special banquet tendered him.

"Police of New York and Honolulu, my home," he said to the dinner-jacketed assembly, "have one thing in common. Both live on small island. But while we have big volcano you have biggest shake-up."

His description was greeted by laughter while his keen eyes watched a uniformed officer come into the room, bend over Inspector Nelson, of the Homicide Squad, and

whisper a few words. He saw Nelson stiffen suddenly.

But he continued: "Someday hope to greet honorable brothers in Hawaii where roar of surf replace roar of subway and hot rhythms of Broadway are cooled by strains of *Aloha*."

Inspector Nelson waited until the applause died down and then rose, turning to Charlie Chan.

"There goes my fishing trip," he said, disgusted. "And I was all set to get away in the morning. There's been a murder uptown. That Billie Bronson woman's been bumped at the Hottentot Club and a young man who says he's your son is being held as a suspect. I think you'd better come along."

Chan swallowed hard at the mention of Lee and for once he nearly broke through his Oriental calm and complacency. But all he said, tensely, was:

"We go right away." He turned to the assembly. "Excuse, please."

In one of the two police cars roaring to the scene of the murder, Charlie Chan sat wondering how Lee had become involved, and mulled over what he already knew about the mysterious Billie Bronson.

He and Lee had been on the *Normandie* with the woman, and some peculiar things had occurred. First, a man had ransacked her cabin, and Chan and Lee had intervened in time to scare the intruder away. Next, she had come into their cabin a little later, and asked for some aspirin. That wouldn't have meant anything if Chan hadn't already noticed a bottle of aspirin tablets on her dressing table.

Chan had puzzled over the strange actions in his meditative fashion, but had arrived at no definite conclusion. Now, however, they offered material for provocative thought.

As he entered the Hottentot Club, the Chinese detective did not notice Buzz Moran, his hat pulled down over his eyes, his face averted, saunter from the place, eyeing him furtively. He did, however, find himself fascinated by all the people with cameras.

"Metropolitan newspaper photographers," he said, "more prompt than police. Also more numerous."

Nelson's grim expression dissolved into a chuckle.

"They're camera hounds," he explained. "They're shooting for prizes. The club even gives 'em a dark room and a man to print their stuff right here on the premises."

"Very interesting," Chan said reflectively. "Camera remember many things human eye forget."

"Huh?" Nelson blinked. "Oh, I get you!" He turned to a plain-clothes man. "Don't let anybody with a camera get out of here. We want every roll of film in the place."

He stalked up to Burke's office, followed by Chan. Speed Patten, whom Chan had met at the docks that afternoon, greeted them breezily.

"Didn't waste any time getting here, did you?" Nelson grunted.

"Have you seen the body?"

"Seen it? I found it!"

"Good. That makes you a suspect."

"Flatterer!"

CHAN was studying the room. His first interest was his son, handcuffed, sitting unhappily in a chair, guarded by a stolid-faced policeman. Louie, the headwaiter, stood against the wall. Marie Collins was slumped resentfully on a divan. Johnny Burke stopped his pacing, eyed Chan and Nelson truculently. On the desk, near the phone, Chan saw a plate of sandwiches covered with a napkin.

Billie Bronson's body lay behind a wing chair, face lifted blankly upward.

Nelson nodded to Burke. "I knew I'd be seeing you on business sooner or later."

Lee rose, came to his father's side.

"Pop! Tell them who I am!" he demanded.

Chan looked at him reproachfully and said to Nelson:

"Reluctantly confess he is portion of posterity."

"Yeah?" the stolid-faced officer



*Warner Oland (CHARLIE CHAN) in the Twentieth Century-Fox
Production of CHARLIE CHAN ON BROADWAY*

sneered. "Then what was he doin' peepin' through the keyhole?"

Chan smiled. "Humbly suggest murderer not likely to go outside and contemplate victim through keyhole." He turned to Lee. "But please explain embarrassing presence here."

"I was only looking for Billie Bronson," Lee said eagerly. "I peeked through a lot of keyholes. She was trying to get into our hotel room. She said it was a mistake—

but I thought I'd follow her anyhow, so—"

Chan looked thoughtful.

"The kid's all right," Nelson said. "Release him." Out of the tail of his eye, he saw Burke reaching for the phone. "Lay off that phone," he snapped. "Don't touch anything in this office."

The medical examiner interrupted with his report. "Bullet entered the back just below the left shoulder

blade, passed through the right ventricle and was probably stopped by a bone. Can't get the bullet until the autopsy."

"Can give approximate time of death, please?" Chan asked.

"About half an hour ago."

"Half an hour ago," Nelson said, "I was thinking of bass instead of bullets. What a lousy break."

"You should be catching fish," Marie Collins snapped, looking up from the divan, her eyes sullen. "No wonder Johnny wants to call a mouthpiece. He'll need one with you handling the case."

"Yeah—and so will you," Nelson retorted. He turned to the cop. "Anybody find the gun?"

"No, sir. We searched as well as we could, but we didn't want to disturb anything."

"That's a help," Nelson sighed. "Call Homicide for a fingerprint man, and have the whole room gone over."

Chan turned to Speed Patten. "Body is in same position now as when discovered?"

"Sure," Patten replied. "I didn't touch a thing."

NELSON looked at Chan inquiringly. The Chinese detective then shrugged.

"Position of body sometime give solution of murder. Like Number One son, keep forgetting this not my affair. Sorry to intrude."

Nelson nodded, whirled suddenly on Burke. "Billie Bronson came up here to see you, didn't she?"

"So do a lot of other people," Burke said gruffly.

"But they don't all get murdered—stop me if I'm wrong."

"She could come up to visit Johnny without him killing her, couldn't she?" Marie Collins interrupted.

"You ought to know," Nelson snapped.

"What do you mean by that crack?"

"You and Billie were friends until she had to blow town," Nelson elaborated. "Then like a good little pal, you move in on her boy friend."

After a year he gets fed up with you and sends for Billie—"

Marie whirled on Burke. The manager shook his head in denial.

"He's just fishing."

"I wish I was," Nelson said. "Anyhow, Billie hits town, beats it up here to see you—and you bump her off!"

"That's a lie," Marie cried heatedly. "She was still alive—and mad—when Johnny left the room. I came in about that time and saw them. Johnny and I left the room together."

"In other words," sneered Nelson, "you both leave the room—she's alone—and she gets so mad she shoots herself in the back and then hides the gun."

There was a disturbance at the door, and Joan Wendell barged into the room. She marched angrily to Nelson.

"Say, what's the idea—I can't get out of this joint!"

"You can—after I see the pictures you took," Nelson said.

"I only took one," she said, handing it over. "It's a honey. You see, I came up here and found the body—"

"He says *he* did," Nelson interrupted, pointing to Speed Patten.

"My turn to get the beat, darling," said Patten placidly.

Joan looked crestfallen. "Well," she consoled herself, "as Mr. Chan would say—one picture worth ten thousand words."

Chan bowed his acknowledgment. Nelson looked up from the picture.

"You said a mouthful then. And I'm not so sure that you didn't find the body first, after all." He beckoned to Chan. "Take a look at this, Mr. Chan. The napkin on the tray there, isn't in the picture?"

Chan nodded and looked up from the photograph. "Also interesting to note telephone jump back on hook since photo taken!"

"You're right!" Nelson exclaimed. He turned to Patten. "Was that phone on or off when you found the body?"

"It was off," Speed answered casually. "I put it back on."

"That's just grand!" Nelson ground out angrily. "You know, there *might* have been some fingerprints on there!"

"I'm sorry, Nelson." The columnist apologized sincerely. "When I saw it was off the hook I thought Billie might have been talking to somebody. Well, nobody answered, so I went ahead and phoned in my story."

"Do you use a napkin when you talk?" the inspector bit out sarcastically, pointing to the one on the tray.

"Napkin?" Speed looked at him, surprised. "I never touched it."

Nelson frowned.

"If it isn't too much," Joan asked sweetly, "can I have my picture back now, please, and get out of here?"

"One moment, please," interjected Chan. "Observe picture more closely."

There was a magnifying glass in his hand.

The others crowded around Chan. Burke nodded his head almost imperceptibly to Louie, who was standing close to the wall.

Louie nodded back, reached for the light switch.

ABRUPTLY the room went dark, followed by instant bedlam.

"Watch the door!" bellowed Nelson.

As the others shouted, Burke ducked into the hall. Chan groped his way to the wall, clicked the switch on.

"I've got him!" the stolid-faced policeman panted, struggling desperately on the floor.

He stood up over the body he had been straddling. Nelson stared down at Lee, who rubbed his neck painfully.

The inspector snarled at the cop, ran out into the hall. The officer on duty there had been slugged and was just getting to his feet. Nelson's face set grimly.

"Get Headquarters," he commanded. "Send out a general alarm for Johnny Burke! I want him picked up before morning!"

CHAPTER III

DEATH STRIKES AGAIN



SPEED PATTEN was heading for the phone on the desk as Inspector Nelson slammed back into Burke's office.

"Hey, you—wait a minute!" He shoved the newspaper man away.

"I gotta phone this story into the office," Patten said, excited. "It puts the finger on Burke, all right!"

Nelson's eyes narrowed. "If you touch that phone again, I'll put *five* fingers on *you*!" He shook his fist under Speed Patten's nose. "Now get out of here and use the phone downstairs!" He caught sight of Joan near the desk. "And take that dame with you!"

"And the picture?" Joan asked demurely.

Nelson waved her away. "That's evidence—beat it!"

When the columnist had left with the girl, the inspector turned to Chan.

"Speaking of pictures, what were you going to show me when Burke took a powder on us?"

Chan held up his hand. "First would point out that napkin resting on tray also take powder!"

Nelson looked quickly at the tray and then on the floor.

"Well, I'll be—I wonder why Burke took that napkin?" His face looked grim as he took the picture and magnifying glass from Chan.

"Observe carefully contents of unfortunate lady's purse scattered on floor," Chan pointed out. "Compare articles now on floor with those in picture."

Nelson looked at the open purse still gripped in Billie's hand. Strewn on the floor were a compact, a handkerchief, small change and a lipstick.

The inspector turned his eyes back to the picture again.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed, surprised. "There's no key on the

floor—but there's one in the picture!"

"Missing key may fit door to solution," Chan commented.

"It looks like a hotel key—it's got a tag!" Nelson said, excitedly, as he peered through the glass.

"Perhaps can decipher number?" Chan prodded gently.

Nelson looked up.

"It says three-thirteen — Carlton Hotel!" he informed.

Lee stared at his father with a look of bewilderment. Chan nodded.

"Room three-thirteen — Carlton Hotel," he said slowly to Nelson, "temporary abode this humble person, and offspring!"

The inspector appeared completely fogged for a moment. Then on the alert again, he turned to his men.

"Bring Marie along!" he ordered. "We're going to have a look at that room!"

Back in the police cars, they made the Carlton Hotel in record-breaking time. While the policemen stood with drawn guns, Chan coolly opened the door, stepped into the room.

Obviously it had been the object of an intensive search. Luggage was opened, laundry scattered about, drawers pulled out. Charlie Chan took all this in at a glance—and then peered at something huddled on the floor. A dead body.

NELSON stooped quickly, and examined the corpse.

"Stabbed through the ribs," he announced. "Not over a couple of minutes ago. Blood's still coming from the wound." He turned to one of the uniformed men. "Get the medical examiner." He gestured at another. "Out the fire-escape."

"Pop!" Lee's excited voice broke in. "It's the man we met this morning on the boat, when someone tried to rob Miss Bronson's stateroom!"

Nelson looked up, puzzled.

"This whole thing is getting a little screwy to me," he said to Chan. "What would this mug want in *your* room?"

Chan thought deeply for a moment, then replied:

"Mud of bewilderment now begin-

ning to clear from pool of thought. This man follow Miss Bronson on boat to get something she possess. To safeguard same, she use my baggage as hiding place."

"I remember, Pop," Lee interrupted. "That's when she came in for the aspirin."

"Have hit tack on cranium," Chan said nodding. "Tonight Miss Bronson try to regain secret possession here—but Number One son prove stumbling block."

"Now it's clear!" exclaimed Nelson. "Burke gets your key when it drops from Billie's purse and comes here in time to get *that* guy." He pointed to the corpse. "He stabs him and makes a getaway with what they were all after. But what were they after?"

Marie was staring at the body, and as Nelson moved aside, she caught a full view of the face. She swayed back, her fist jamming her mouth.

"What's the matter?" Nelson demanded.

"That—that's my husband!"

"Your husband, eh?" Nelson repeated. "Well, well, now we're getting some place!"

Under the inspector's sharp grilling, Marie confessed that she had left the man, Tom Mitchell, for Burke, but she refused to say more.

"Please—perhaps kinder to question lady later," Chan suggested to Nelson.

"Very well—I get the set-up." Nelson motioned to an officer. "Take her to Headquarters."

Chan suddenly darted aside, stooped, and picked up a crumpled scrap of paper near a trunk. He unfolded it, read what was written on it, turned to Nelson.

"Most interesting reading on torn paper on floor!" he said.

Nelson took it and read:

Johnny told me he gave five grand to Alderman K for protection today. It was deposited to the account of R. Brady, a phony name. Murdock called me again today. He's sure hot to get this diary.

Nelson whistled.

"Murdock—the managing editor

of the *Bulletin*, Chan! And a diary! So that's what they were after!"

"No poison more deadly than ink," mused Chan.

The officer who had checked the fire-escape crawled back into the room.

"Nothing down below," he reported.

"Say," Lee interjected suddenly, "I just remembered something. Miss Bronson said she was staying in this hotel, too, and her room was four-thirteen—right above us!"

CHAN patted Lee on the back. "Regret slow progress of thought, but rejoice at final arrival!"

"Come on, let's go up," said Nelson.

He led the way to the room on the floor above. He tried the door. It was unlocked. He opened it and entered, followed by Lee and Chan.

Seated at an easy chair, near the open window, was a man. He looked up, mildly astonished at the three men studying him. He blinked his eyes owlshly for a moment.

"Hello, Nelson," he said. "This is a surprise."

"What are you doing here, Murdock?" Nelson demanded.

"Waiting for Billie Bronson."

"She's been murdered."

Murdock looked up quickly, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not surprised."

"Snap out of it, Murdock. Somebody shot Miss Bronson at the Hottentot. That somebody got a key to the room below from her purse, ransacked it, stabbed a fellow named Tom Mitchell. That window was open. This window is, too."

"So," said Murdock, unimpressed, "I could have killed Mitchell and then come up the fire-escape to this room. Well, I didn't. I had an appointment to meet Miss Bronson here at ten-thirty. It's now twenty minutes to eleven."

"Would object to revealing nature of appointment?" Chan interposed, mildly.

"Not at all. I came up here to buy her diary."

"Excuse, please—but no doubt can

produce money intended for purchase of diary?"

Murdock produced a wallet so full of bills that Lee's eyes popped.

"And cheap at that," Murdock offered. "Miss Bronson's diary contained enough information on rackets and politics to blow this city higher than a kite!"

He had hardly finished this statement when Speed Patten breezed in.

He grinned, on seeing the money.

"What's this? The payoff?"

Nelson glared at him. "Always the wise guy, aren't you?"

"I have to be to keep up with you boys. Why don't you light some place where you can be found?" He produced a folded newspaper, handed it triumphantly to Murdock. It carried the headline:

BILLIE BRONSON SLAIN

"Get a load of that!" Patten said cockily. "I beat the town! You ought to be in the office once in a while, Chief. I phoned in the yarn when you were out."

"You knew I was coming here. I told you so this afternoon."

"Yeah, but you crossed me up. You weren't due here until eleven-thirty!"

Nelson leaped forward, shook his finger in Murdock's face.

"You told us the date was ten-thirty!"

"Miss Bronson telephoned, changed the hour," Murdock said, unpleasantly.

"Most unfortunate—proof of alibi now locked inside dead lips of murdered girl," Chan murmured.

"I'm not so sure you didn't get the diary without paying for it!" Nelson thundered at Murdock. "I'm going to search you for it."

"Am I under arrest?" Murdock demanded.

"Well—eh—no."

"Then keep your hands in your own pockets. If you—"

The ringing of the telephone interrupted him. Nelson answered it, looked surprised.

"That's fine," he said. "Let Marie

Collins go, and trail her. She'll lead us right to Burke."

He replaced the receiver, turned to the others, feeling pleased with the turn in events.

"The gun was found in Burke's office. It was sold to Billie Bronson two years ago. There are two sets of fingerprints on it—hers and Johnny Burke's. We'll pick up Burke tonight and I'll go fishing in the morning."

"Then," said Murdock smugly, "I presume my part in the case is finished?"

Chan eyed Murdock inscrutably.

"Perhaps," he said, slowly. "But murder case like revolving door. When one side close, other side open!"

While the others watched him curiously, wondering what he had meant, he went to Inspector Nelson. He spoke in a low voice.

"Excuse apparent ego please, but will make known to press Chan has almost reached solution of case? Then inspector may organize expedition against finny tribe."

Nelson's eyebrows lifted.

"Is that true? You really know?"

"Rely on old saying that wish is father to deed."

CHAPTER IV

STRATEGY FAILS



NUMBER ONE son, Lee, in pajamas, paced the floor of the hotel room. Chan was in bed, his nose buried in a newspaper.

"Pop, I wish you hadn't moved us up here," Lee complained. "I'll bet there's some clue in our old room that would clinch the case."

He stopped, saw that his father was paying no attention to him.

"Say, what're you reading?"

"Murder case of Miss Billie Bronson," Chan answered blandly. He folded his copy of the *Bulletin*, and placed it on the night table.

"Gee, I should think you'd know enough about it already." Lee grinned. He stopped pacing, climbed into bed. Chan reached up, pulled the chain of his bed lamp as Lee said, thoughtfully:

"The whole case looks perfectly clear to me, Pop. They found Burke's fingerprints on the gun, didn't they? What other angle—"

"Evidently forget disappearance of napkin. For time being consider only which angle to arrange self on mattress. Now please turn out light and extinguish conversation."

Chan sighed heavily as Lee turned off his own bed lamp. The detective pulled the covers over his head and pretended sleep. He waited until he heard the deep, even breathing of his son. Then he slipped from beneath the covers noiselessly, got into his dressing gown, in which he had already slipped a revolver, and made his way to Room 313. With the key he had retained under arrangement with the management, he quietly entered.

As he stuffed pillows and blankets under the covers of the twin beds so that it would appear that he and Lee were sleeping in them, he wondered if his piece of strategy—having Nelson announce that he was close to the solution of the double murder mystery—would have the effect he wanted.

He went to an overstuffed chair, pulled it into a corner of the room so that he could watch the window, which he had raised for the convenience of his expected intruder, and sat down in it.

The time passed quickly for him as he waited, for he devoted his time to running over the case, considering the various suspects, their motives, their characters.

Finally he heard a faint noise on the fire-escape and his body stiffened. He slipped the gun from his pocket, held it ready. In the faint light he saw the blurred outlines of a man. The intruder eased himself into the darkened room.

Then Chan said quietly:

"Think it will improve condition of health if hands are elevated."

Chan's keen eyes were busy trying to measure the man when, without warning, the door leading into the hall opened.

"Hey, Pop!" came Lee's voice. "Where are you?"

Chan turned his head for the fraction of a second.

The invader took advantage of this. He leaped for the window, dived through it. Chan's belated shot crashed into the sill. The Oriental rushed to the window, fired downward at the fleeing intruder, but his shots, blocked by the flat iron of the fire-escape, were ineffective.

CHAN turned around, faced his offspring.

"Still think best for case if you relax," he said.

"I'm sorry, Pop. I thought you were in trouble, maybe."

"Father recommend less thought, more sleep for growing Number One son."

And characteristically, he made no further mention of Lee's unfortunate interruption. They returned to their room and slept undisturbed.

The next morning Chan went to Headquarters. He found Inspector Nelson in his office, listening to Speed Patten broadcast the latest news on the Bronson-Mitchell murder cases. Patten, alert and up to the minute in developments, was doing an excellent job.

"When Billie Bronson and Thomas Mitchell were murdered last night, it was Charlie Chan who found the torn diary page. But the *Daily Bulletin* must point out that this page may indicate the work of a perfect criminal—a criminal so clever and so daring that he *deliberately* dropped that diary page at the scene of the second crime, to obtain free publicity for a grand blackmailing scheme.

"What a way to warn New York that he has this dynamite diary and is ready to knock daylights out of the night life of certain guys and gals along the Great White Way! I wonder if Johnny Burke is the only higher-up with rising blood

pressure—or whether a certain milk-fed racketeer may not have to drink something stronger now to quiet his nerves!"

Chan had come in close to the end of the broadcast. He and Nelson heard Speed Patten sign off, and then the inspector clicked off the switch.

"He's certainly got the lowdown!" Nelson exclaimed. "He's going to crack wise once too often on that party line of his and we'll be sending him posies. Say, Chan, I still want to know why you asked me to give out the fact you were near a solution and—"

The buzz of Nelson's dictaphone broke into his question. He pressed down a button, answered. Chan saw his grim smile as he said:

"Send him in!"

Nelson released the button, turned to Chan.

"Johnny Burke's given himself up!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to give him a working over!"

"Make humble suggestion you apply paraffin test to hand to determine if it has fired gun," Chan replied.

"Say, that's a great idea!"

Burke came into the office, flanked by his attorney, Meeker, and a couple of uniformed policemen. Nelson quickly explained the nature of the test.

"You aren't afraid of putting yourself in the hands of science, are you?" he demanded. "It's simple. We coat your hand with paraffin, remove it, and then apply diphenylamine and sulphuric acid to the paraffin which has been next to your hand. If you've fired a gun within the last twenty-four hours, the solution will turn any nitrates in the paraffin blue. If the test is negative, then you haven't fired a gun. Get the idea?"

"Sure. I'll do it."

The group went to the police laboratory where Nelson's triumph proved short-lived. The test showed negative.

"Then you didn't do it," Nelson said, unable to conceal the disappointment in his voice. "Get out of

here, Burke, and take your shyster with you!"

He turned to Chan, as the two left the office.

"That lets him out all right."

"Maybe. This one case where murder could have clean hands."

"Why?"

"Remember napkin that disappear from night club? Possibly used to cover hand that fire murder gun."

Nelson looked at him thoughtfully, but before he could say anything, the door opened and Speed Patten



breezed in. Evidently the news of Burke's release had been immediately received by the press. Patten turned to Chan.

"Looks like Burke pulled a nifty on you," he said.

"Perhaps," said Chan, quietly. "But release of Mr. Burke suggest another nifty."

"What's that?" Nelson asked him.

"You have candid camera photos taken last night at Hottentot Club?"

"Yeah." Nelson was puzzled. He reached into a desk drawer, pulled out a large number of prints.

Chan ran through them, sorted them.

"Find very interesting sequence," Chan reported, as Nelson watched him, interested, puzzled at the same time. "Just like motion picture. Suggest you round up all persons involved. This Buzz Moran. Marie Collins. Johnny Burke. Murdock, of the *Bulletin*. Things of possible excitement happen."

Patten looked at Chan.

"You mean, this is the payoff?"

Chan nodded as he picked up the photographs.

"Bring all individuals to Hottentot Club," he directed. "We meet at scene of first crime."

CHAPTER V

CHAN'S SURPRISE



AT THE appointed time, all were on hand.

Nelson's men had worked smoothly, efficiently. They'd caught Johnny Burke and Marie Collins at Newark Airport just as they had been about to board a plane for Chicago to hide out until the trouble blew over. Murdock they had found in his offices at the *Bulletin* scarcely a minute after he had received a special delivery letter and had jammed it in his pocket. Buzz Moran had found two plainclothes men in his limousine a moment after it had stopped at a traffic light on Broadway and Fifty-second Street.

Nelson, Speed Patten, Chan and Lee, the latter carrying the candid camera photographs, entered the office, dodging a crowd of newspaper reporters who had gathered in the hall.

"How does Speed Patten get into that place when we're barred?" one reporter demanded of Nelson, heatedly. Patten himself answered, laughing.

"I found the body—I'm a suspect," he said. He picked Joan from the group, marched her inside with him.

"She's wanted, too," he explained. "She took the murder photograph."

When the group entered the room, Murdock immediately protested his arrest. He was in ill humor.

"Look here, Nelson," he said. "You've gone far enough with this thing."

"Quiet," ordered Nelson. "Chan has a few things to say to you."

Chan turned to Lee, who gave him the photographs. He bowed to the assemblage.

"Excuse abrupt invitation here, but all present seriously involved in death of Billie Bronson and Thomas Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell follow Miss Bronson from Europe to

obtain diary containing much scandal. Plan to use same to ruin Mr. Burke, who stole love of wife, Marie."

Hardened faces glared at Chan. Marie jumped up.

"That's plain downright collusion!" she protested. "I'm a respectable girl. I—"

Chan eyed her coldly.

"Pardon, please. Am not questioning respectability. Merely offer proof of intimacy."

He held up a photograph which had been taken when she and Burke had kissed in the hallway in the club just before the killing of Billie Bronson.

"Triangle very ancient motive for murder," Chan said. Then he sprang a second surprise.

"Sudden appearance of Miss Bronson create perspiration on brow of another gentleman. Name—Buzz Moran!"

"Wait a minute!" Moran protested. "I didn't even know the dame was in town."

Chan smiled and produced a photograph showing Buzz Moran threatening Billie when she entered the Hottentot Club.

"Okay—I admit I talked to her," Moran confessed, shrugging his shoulders. "But when I heard she was bumped off I didn't want to get mixed up in it, so I kept my mouth shut."

MARIE COLLINS advanced on him.

"Sure!" she charged. "They had Johnny on the spot, so *you* had nothing to worry about!"

Inspector Nelson dragged her away from the sleek gangster just when she was about to spring on him.

"You talk too much, Marie," he said. He turned to Chan. "Go ahead, Charlie," he ordered.

"Miss Bronson came to this office last night. Mr. Burke—and then Miss Collins—have talk with her. Testimony state both people leave her alone for few minutes. In same few minutes someone murder her with gun wrapped in napkin to hide

fingerprints. Inquisitive girl photographer arrive, create interruption. Murderer hide while girl photograph body with napkin off tray."

Joan looked frightened. Speed Patten took her hand in his, as Chan continued.

"Girl then leave and murderer return napkin to tray. After which Mr. Patten enter, find body, call Mr. Murdock. By strange coincidence Mr. Murdock absent on trail of diary!"

Murdock, with a determined look in his eyes, rose to his feet. He faced Nelson.

"Has Chan a picture of me in his valuable collection?"

"Regret distinguished features only ones missing!" Chan himself replied.

"Then that lets me out!"

Nelson's air of boredom revealed that he wasn't impressed.

"How about the murder of Mitchell in Chan's room?"

"It's obvious that both crimes were committed by the same person," Murdock flared. "I'm leaving here—"

"Just a minute!" Chan's voice was firm. "Excuse, please. Before you remove honorable person would request letter received through mail."

Murdock looked at Chan as if he believed the suave detective had accomplished a miracle.

"Why—ah—which letter do you mean?" he faltered. "My mail is very heavy."

"You're wasting time, Murdock," Nelson fired, gruffly. "You got a special delivery letter tonight. We've had your mail watched since yesterday! Hand it over."

Murdock knew he was cornered, passed over the letter. Nelson glanced over it, looked up at Chan.

"It's another page from Billie's diary!" he exclaimed. Chan read it as Murdock blustered:

"I wouldn't have printed it without your permission, Nelson. After all, it just arrived as your man picked me up. I haven't even read it through!"

Nelson advanced on him, but Chan held up a restraining hand.

"Perhaps best to read contents aloud before making rash move."

"Okay," Nelson agreed. "I'll read it. It says: 'May seventh—Was up all night on a big party Johnny swung for Lieutenant R. of the Central Bureau—'"

Nelson cleared his throat, looked at Chan, then studied Burke and Marie, saw the tenseness written on their faces. Then he continued:

"'He's retiring from the force because the commissioner got wise to him. The big dummy showed everybody a diamond watch Buzz Moran gave him for certain important tip-offs that Johnny told me about.'"

Moran whirled on Burke, who cringed.

"I don't know how she found that out, Buzz," he temporized. "I never told her anything."

Moran lunged at Burke, grabbed him by the coat lapels.

"Break it up!" Nelson snapped at Moran.

Moran obeyed, sullenly. Nelson continued to read:

"'It was sure funny to see everybody kowtow to Johnny and Buzz. I guess that they don't know that the toughest guy in the rackets is Speed Patten, the doublecrosser who uses his newspaper job as a cover-up for the blackmail he pulls—'"

Chan, watching Patten, saw the columnist's face suddenly contort with anger. He darted forward, grabbed the page from Nelson's hand.

"Wait a minute!" he demanded. "Let me see that!"

Nelson let him study it.

"This is a phony!" Patten pronounced.

Chan shot two words at him.

"Can prove?"

"Certainly!" Patten fired back.

"Why, even the paper it's written on—" he caught himself. He stared first at Nelson, then at Chan.

"Go ahead," Nelson urged grimly.

The others in the room now realized that the trap had been sprung, were leaning forward tensely at this unexpected development.

"Say, what is this?" Speed Patten demanded, hoarsely.

Chan informed him quietly.

"You are the murderer of Billie Bronson and Thomas Mitchell. You are the fellow who tried to kill me last night after Nelson had tipped you that I was close to the solution. Unfortunately I have set trap for fox and rabbit walks in to spoil it."

Chan shot an oblique glance at Lee, who was covered with confusion.

"You're crazy!" defended Patten.

"Beg to differ, Mr. Patten. First suspicion arrive after reading your newspaper story of Billie Bronson crime telephoned to office from scene of murder. You state victim shot in back. Quite true. Yet photograph show body face upward and you have touched nothing, you have talked to nobody before using telephone. Only murderer know location of hidden wound."

NELSON watched Speed Patten. The newspaperman was perspiring and had a wild look in his eyes.

"Later," Chan continued, slowly, "on radio you further betray self by mentioning names other suspects and their relation to diary. Thus skilfully advertising possession of same and hinting at blackmail to follow. But large ego overcome judgment when you broadcast case as perfect crime. You are indeed clever man. But not clever enough to avoid ancient trap set by us. Inspector Nelson and self plant bogus diary page on Mr. Murdock."

"You were the only one, Patten, who swallowed the bait," Nelson cut in.

"You'll never convict me on that!" Patten's voice was a shrill scream.

"Contradiction, please," pressed Chan. "To recognize forgery one must have original!"

"Well, why don't you deny it?" Nelson demanded. "Billie's diary is somewhere in your apartment. That is all I'll need to put you on ice."

Speed Patten's face went white and his features were twisted as he backed slowly away from Chan and whipped a gun from a shoulder holster inside his coat. His wild, frightened glance went from one person to

another as he threatened everyone with the weaving pistol.

"All right, I did it!" he snarled. "I killed 'em both. I overheard Billie tell Burke she was going to the D.A. and blow the lid off the town. That would have meant me, too. I offered her plenty to keep quiet—but she wouldn't take it. Said she had a better deal on. So I shot her."

NELSON sought to distract Patten's attention from the gun as the murderer backed to the door.

"Why did you bump Mitchell?"

"When I got to Chan's room he'd already found the diary. I had to have it. Well, that's the story, Nelson. You wouldn't have caught me in a million years. Chan's too smart, though. That's why I tried to bump him." He turned to Chan. "I've got you to thank for this rap—and here is how I'm showing my gratitude!"

He aimed the pistol and his index finger convulsed.

But little Lee was just out of his line of vision. When he saw his father at the brink of death, he made a wild leap over a table, his head and shoulders striking Speed Patten at the knees. As Patten crashed downward, the gun flew up. The bullet smacked into the ceiling.

Lee followed up his advantage, pinned Patten to the floor. The women screamed as the uniformed police closed in, took the gun from the columnist, and jerked him to his feet. His face was white with wrath. Lee was grinning. He turned to his father.

"Number One son okay, Pop," he said as he brushed off his coat and straightened it. "In other words, the rabbit catches the fox after all."

Chan grinned his gratitude.

"Proud to see two good men in family," he said.

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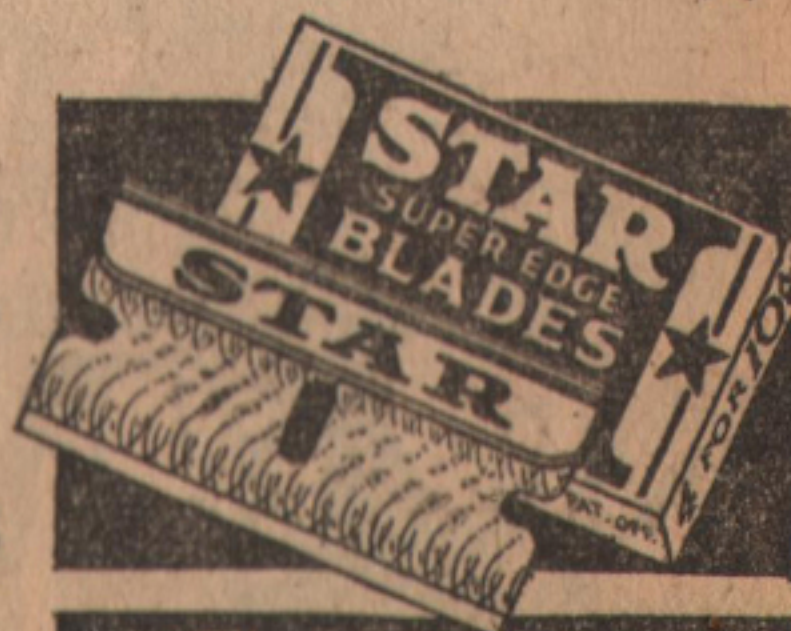
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