



At the explosions, the burro stampeded,
bucking and kicking off the packs

DEMONS OF DISASTER

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

*Goldfield sluice-box robbers threaten to annex a Chinese miners' dust—
but they face a roaring Oriental surprise!*

SQUATTING on his heels beside the fire in front of the small log cabin, old Lee Chung ate gobs of rice and chunks of boiled pork with his chopsticks. His cousin, Wong Chin, a younger Oriental, sat on the opposite side of the fire and ate also.

The brilliant sunset had died in the western sky, and dusk was descending into the rocky canyon through which the tumbling whitewater creek rushed to empty into the Yuba River. The firelight played over the faces of the two men as they devoured their evening meal.

Wong Chin was watching old Lee Chung's countenance carefully, hoping to read therein some inkling of what Lee Chung was thinking, what he

intended doing about the situation that confronted them, and hoping it would not be something he would dislike.

For there was an important problem to be solved. The demons of disaster had been visiting this modest gold-seekers' camp on the bank of the creek again. So it followed that the gods were displeased about something, and Lee and Wong should do whatever would appease them and gain their favor.

What did it profit them to work from daylight until dusk each day and wash out gold-dust and nuggets if evil men came and robbed their sluice boxes and took the rewards of their toil? And once the masked visitors had even located the poke

which Lee Chung believed he had hidden so cunningly, and had taken that.

Wong Chin wished half a hundred times a day that he had remained in the thriving city of San Francisco instead of coming out here to this lonesome rocky canyon on the Yuba river to help his elderly kinsman on the claim.

A Chinese could make good money in San Francisco washing shirts for miners and gamblers, and many of their own kind lived there. They could play fantan and dominoes together, and with the frantic gold-rushers coming to the diggings on every ship there was always amusing activity.

Lee Chung again silently filled his bowl with rice and boiled pork from the big pot over the cooking fire, grasped his chopsticks, and looked across at Wong Chin.

"There must be a swift end to it!" he declared. "We have suffered more than our proper share at the hands of the thieves. The gods must be appeased so they will grant us a season of good fortune."

Wong Chin began jabbering in his native tongue, but his elderly cousin halted him with a gesture.

"You will speak Melican," Lee ordered. "Must learn language well." Then he dropped into his native tongue himself. "I have considered our problem. The demons of disaster are preying upon us. They must be driven away, so we may profit in peace from our hard toil."

Wong Chin nodded his head vigorously in agreement.

"A low thief stole our poke," Lee continued. "Three times our sluice boxes have been robbed of gold. One time a masked man held a flaming stick to my naked toes to make me tell where our dust and nuggets were hidden. It is too much!"

WONG nodded in agreement again, so vigorously this time that his queue, which had been wrapped around his head, became undone and slapped him in his face.

"A certain amount of trouble and adversity is good for a man, but we have had too much," Lee announced. "So, I have made a decision. At dawn tomorrow you will start for Sacramento."

Wong Chin's slant eyes opened a bit wider than usual at that and he sat erect, but otherwise did not reveal he had been startled. So he was to journey to Sacramento! Next to San Francisco, he liked

Sacramento best. He had several cousins there, younger than Lee Chung.

"You will go to the joss house and see the priest," Lee instructed. "You will burn many punk sticks in front of the joss. You will get plenty of sacred firecrackers which have been blessed by priest, and you will return here swiftly. We will shoot off sacred firecrackers and frighten away the demons of disaster."

Wong Chin thought that would be an excellent idea, especially since it would give him a trip to Sacramento. It was the proper thing to do under the circumstances.

He would go to Sacramento and see the head priest at the joss house, burn punk sticks before the sacred joss, make a suitable donation, get the blessed firecrackers and return at top speed.

Then he and his elderly cousin would shoot the loud firecrackers a string at a time and make a terrific din. The demons of disaster would be frightened and driven out of the canyon, out of the Yuba River district, and bother them no more.

Now that everything was planned, Wong Chin gave his attention to the meal. He filled his bowl from the pot again and ate ravenously, his mind on the forthcoming journey.

A loud "hee-haw" made him jerk and almost drop chopsticks and bowl.

"It is the devil animal belonging to the men up the gulch," Lee said. "You encourage him, my cousin. His evil master, known to men as Chuck Gardon, is the chief of the sluice robbers, I believe."

A burro ambled into the circle of firelight and stood waiting with his head extended. He was a shaggy beast, generally docile, but known to have a fit of energy at times, especially when frightened. He made a habit of coming down the canyon and stopping at the cabin, for Wong had made the mistake once of giving him sugar. "It is good to be kind to animals," Wong said.

He got up and hurried into the cabin, and returned with a handful of sugar. The burro licked the sugar from his hand, voiced his thanks, and walked around the fire to return up the canyon.

"It is a waste," Lee complained. "Feeding good sugar to a donkey. You must learn thrift, my cousin. Go now, and stretch on your pallet, for you must rest and be up before dawn to start your journey. I'll have a package of cold food ready for you."

It was just at dawn when Wong Chin bobbed his head in farewell to Lee Chung and left the cabin to hurry down the canyon beside the tumbling stream. Hidden on his person was a tiny poke containing a couple of pinches of gold dust for his traveling expenses.

He carried the package of cold food Lee had prepared. And he wore his oldest and most comfortable sandals, which gave with every movement of his feet and helped him cling safely to the surfaces of slippery rocks.

Where the tumbling creek emerged from the canyon and emptied into the Yuba River, Wong came upon a comfortable cabin. A man was working at the edge of the stream, and a girl stood in the cabin doorway.

Eli Madison, a kind middle-aged man, was the owner of this claim. The Chinese in the district liked him because he was honest and fair in his dealings. His wife had died of a fever in Sacramento the year before, and he had brought his daughter Elsie, only twenty, to the claim with him.

Wong Chin bobbed his head in greeting, and Madison stopped shoveling gravel to talk.

"Making a trip to Marysville?" Madison asked.

"Me glo all way to Saclamento," Wong explained, proudly. "Glet back soon as can."

"I'll walk up the creek and visit Lee while yuh've gone," Madison promised. "I want to tell him that I've sent word to Marysville to the Vigilantes. We've had more'n enough of sluice box robbers around here. I shot at a couple the other night, but missed 'em."

Wong bobbed his head to show that he understood, and drew in his breath sharply to indicate that he was sorry Madison had missed.

"The Vigilantes have a pretty good idea about who's doin' the sluice box thievin' around here," Madison continued. "Chuck Gardon and the two men who live with him up the gulch above yore claim. They don't do much work on their property, but they always seem to have plenty of dust to spend."

Wong bobbed his head in agreement. He and Lee Chung had suspected Gardon and his friends.

ELSIE MADISON called to him from the doorway, and he bowed to her and looked at Madison questioningly.

"She's made some cookies," Madison told him, laughing. "Wants to try 'em out on yuh. Go get

some."

Wong hurried to the cabin. Elsie Madison handed him a small paper bag filled with cookies, and he muttered his thanks and bowed again and hurried away. All this ceremony was delaying him, he thought. But the cookies were welcome.

He hurried on down the creek and turned into the trail which ran along the bank of the Yuba to Marysville. He dog-trotted at times where the trail was smooth, and covered the miles easily and without much fatigue. At times, he slowed down and munched cookies.

It was dusk when he reached Marysville, and lights were burning in the shacks and business establishments. Wong sought out one of his own kind he knew, had a meal, and arranged for a pallet upon which to sleep. Then he went down to the principal street.

Nobody gave him special attention, for pigtailed Chinese were not strangers in the district. He shuffled along, keeping his eyes and ears open. He heard bearded miners talking about the sluice box robberies, and of the dreaded Vigilantes, and once he came to where men were reading a freshly painted sign which had been nailed to the side of a store building.

Wong listened as a man read it aloud:

NOTICE!

We have good idea regarding the identities of the sluice box robbers in this district. One more theft, and the guilty men will receive what they deserve. If they are wise, they will leave these diggings immediately.

The Committee.

"Well, it's about time the Vigilantes got after 'em!" a miner standing near Wong said. "If them thieves ain't stopped now, no sluice box along the Yuba will be safe. String 'em up, I say!"

Wong thought that was a good idea. He remembered how Lee Chung's feet had been blistered by a flaming stick. And he knew that all men feared the Vigilantes. Perhaps this warning would stop the thieves, he thought.

He slept at his friend's house and at dawn hastened on, making his way as rapidly as possible toward Sacramento. When he reached his destination, he located some of his cousins and told them of his errand. He rested for a time, ate, then went to the joss house.

Following Lee Chung's orders carefully, Wong burned many punk sticks as he kowtowed humbly before the joss. He gave the head priest a pinch of gold dust and told him of his desire.

"Evil men should be undone," the priest declared, after Wong had finished his recital. "It is a terrible crime to steal. I shall bless many strings of firecrackers, and you shall carry them back and explode them and frighten away the demons of disaster. Then peace will come to your mining claim, and you can enjoy the fruits of your toil."

Fatigued from his journey, Wong spent two days and nights with his cousins in Sacramento, marveling at the manner in which the town was growing, and eating much rice and pork. He was a guest, and did not have to pay for it.

Then he began his homeward trip, the firecrackers safe in a bundle wrapped carefully in waterproof silk, which he hung around his neck and carried on his back. He was eager to get home. Fired in the narrow rocky canyon, he knew, the firecrackers would make a loud noise and frighten the demons of disaster so they would never bother around the canyon again.

In time, he came once more to Marysville, and decided to rest there during the afternoon and night. He visited his friends again, and found them excited.

"Great news came to us yesterday," they told Wong. "There has been a great strike of gold on the Yuba River, just above where your creek empties into the larger stream. The man Madison has found many rich pockets and will be a person of wealth. And the report said also that your cousin and ours, Lee Chung, washed gravel in a new place on your own claim and is now a man of much wealth also."

"Lee Chung and I share alike," Wong told them, trying to keep an expression of happiness out of his face. It was not proper to flaunt his good fortune in the faces of those less fortunate.

"We are your cousins," one of them reminded him. "You must come to Marysville again soon, and perhaps bring us gifts to show that you are truly thankful for the good fortune the gods have given you."

Wong finally managed to get away from them, and hurried down to the crowded street to watch and listen. Men were outfitting feverishly to go to the scene of the new strike. Claims were being staked far up the Yuba, they were saying.

"There's a bunch of Chinese in the little

canyon," Wong heard one man say. "We can stake claims above 'em. We won't bother 'em any. It's bad luck to bother a Chinese."

WONG shuffled on, watching and listening, and trying to gather information. So he came, presently, to the rear of a large building which held the town's biggest saloon and gambling hall. The windows were open, and the roar of the rollicking crowd rolled out.

Wong stepped up close to one of the windows to peer in at the scene. He heard two men talking only a few feet away, as they sat across a table from each other, a bottle and glasses before them.

Wong knew one of them by sight. He was "Chuck" Gardon, who had a claim above Lee's and was suspected of being the leader of the sluice box robbers. The second man was thick in body and heavily bearded, and Wong decided he had mean eyes.

"You don't own the country, Gardon," this man was saying.

"I ain't claimin' I do," Chuck Gardon replied. "I'm sayin' that I was playin' the Yuba River diggin's first. Why can't yuh stay over on the American River and work there?"

"Because the pickin's are gettin' better over on the Yuba," the other man replied. "And it got too hot for us over on the American."

"It's goin' to get hot here, too, Knowles," Chuck Gardon replied. "The cussed Vigilantes are startin' to get busy and fuss around, and yuh know what that'll mean. I'm fixin' to make one more big haul and go down to Frisco. This new strike—there ought to be some fat pokes to pick up if a man acts quick."

"I've got the same idea, Gardon."

"Yeah? Well, I'm warnin' yuh, Knowles, to keep away from the Yuba district, 'specially where I've been workin' with my two men. That man Madison belongs to me. I happen to know that he's the feller who sent for the Vigilantes. I want his gold and his hide, both. And that pair of Chinese in the canyon—they're my meat, too."

"Not unless yuh can get to 'em before I do," the other man told him.

Wong heard somebody approaching, so had to move on swiftly and silently to avoid being caught listening at the window, and possibly getting a stiff cuff on the side of his head.

He understood that Chuck Gardon was

preparing to steal again, and that the other man was of the same sort. Lee Chung and Madison would be at the mercy of them both, unless Wong hurried with the sacred firecrackers and drove the demons of disaster away.

He entered a shop and bought a few cheap presents with a tiny pinch of gold dust and took them to his friends. Later, he stretched himself on a pallet to rest, but did not sleep.

When all his friends were asleep, Wong slipped out of the shack, put on his sandals, fixed his pack, and was ready to start for home. As he neared the street, he heard a tumult. Men were shouting and running toward the big saloon and gambling hall.

"Chuck Gardon and Bart Knowles are fightin'!" he heard somebody yell.

Wong got in the fringe of the crowd to watch. Gardon and Knowles were in the street, slugging it out. The crowd was cheering them on. They seemed about evenly matched, until Gardon picked up a bottle somebody had thrown out of the saloon, and crashed it down on Knowles' head.

Knowles collapsed, and men rushed in to end the battle. Gardon and his two men got through the crowd and started up the street. Unobserved, Wong followed them and saw them enter a shack.

He felt he had an interest in this and that it would not be wrong to play eavesdropper, especially since these men were evil. He got on the dark side of the shack and listened beneath a window.

One of the men was bathing Gardon's cut and bruised face, and the other was opening a box of salve. Gardon was raging.

"I'll get Knowles if we ever meet again!" he threatened. "This country ain't big enough to hold us both! But first we'll make our haul. We'll slip out of town before daylight. You boys get everything ready. We'll beat Knowles to it. We'll travel fast and hit hard, then go over the hills and make for Frisco. The game's played out here."

"If Knowles is able to travel in the mornin', he'll be startin' up there with his men," one of Gardon's companions said. "He's got three men, I happen to know."

"We'll beat him to it, I said. Neither of us can make a haul till tomorrer night. We'll make our plans while we're gettin' to the canyon."

Wong understood all that. And he was eager to learn the plans so he could warn Lee Chung and Eli Madison. He decided he would wait and trail the

trio when they left the town.

He went ahead and waited outside the town, hiding behind some brush. Before daylight, Gardon and his two men appeared, walking at a steady pace. They passed Wong, who trailed at a distance, keeping to the shadows. His sandals made no sound when he walked, and besides the wind was blowing toward him.

AT A SPOT where the trail was almost obscured by shadows, Wong got closer, for the wind was carrying their talk to him. Gardon led the way off the trail and up a ravine.

"We'll cut across so's nobody'll see us," Wong heard him say. "We'll rest in the cabin a few hours, and get everything ready. The dust and nuggets we've taken and got hid—we'd better not carry it on us. We'll pack the burro with our stuff, and put the dust and nuggets inside a flour sack. It'll look like we're just quittin' the diggin's."

"What about this last haul?" one of the men asked.

"Accordin' to what we heard, them Chinese and Madison have struck it rich. Ought to have fat pokes ready for us. We'll go down the canyon and hit the Chinese first, then go on and clean up Madison. I want to handle him! If he's got gold hid, we'll shore make him show us where it is. We'll grab that girl of his and threaten to hurt her if he don't. That'll make him talk."

Wong shivered at that. He didn't want these men to hurt Elsie Madison, who was always kind to him and old Lee, and who baked cookies. He didn't want them even to affront her. He decided he would listen and hear all he could of their plans.

"If Knowles tries to get ahead of us, we must beat him to it," Gardon said. "It'd be rich if we got the dust and nuggets and Knowles got blamed for it and him and his men got strung up. Serve 'em right!"

"How about the Vigilantes?" one of the men asked.

"That's troublin' me some," Chuck Gardon admitted. "We've got to be mighty careful. If they catch us at it, they'll either fill us full of lead or make us stretch rope. I ain't hankerin' for either."

"Yuh reckon the Vigilantes are there already, Chuck?" the other man asked.

"Mebbe. I'll bet they've been slippin' up the Yuba a few at a time since they posted that sign in Marysville. It's my idea they'll gather there and be

in ambush. We've got to smell 'em out."

They were not traveling so fast, off the trail, and since they had left Marysville a little before daylight, Wong knew it would be dusk when they reached the canyon. Now that daylight had come, he was compelled to be careful. If the men ahead saw and recognized him, and thought he was spying on them, they might resort to any kind of violence.

And Wong was compelled now to follow them, for he was utterly lost. Since leaving the regular trail, they had been going through ravines and up slopes. Chuck Gardon evidently was following a path he knew, one he had used before. But Wong did not know it.

To return to the regular trail and follow that would mean loss of too much time. If he dropped back and followed their tracks, he would come to the canyon finally and could go home. Cautiously he watched ahead, to be sure that while ascending some hill they would not look back and see him. Their boot tracks in the soft earth were easy to follow.

Wong realized they were not traveling as fast as he had been, going to Marysville from the canyon, and this route was longer. And it had taken him from dawn until dusk to make the trip. So he knew it would be night before the canyon was reached.

The men ahead stopped in the middle of the day to rest, and Wong was almost discovered as he approached them, scanning the ground for tracks. He hid behind some brush until they started on again. He saw them eating cold food, and knew the gnawing of hunger, for he had brought none himself.

When daylight faded, Wong went faster and got behind them as close as he could and be safe. The wind was still blowing from them to him, and his sandals made no noise. He could hear their boots crunching gravel and striking against rocks, and followed them by sound.

There came a time when Wong could hear, from the distance, a sound he knew came from the rushing of the creek over rocks in the canyon. A glance at the stars told him it was almost midnight.

Just before dawn was the most auspicious hour, he knew, for shooting off the sacred firecrackers. He was eager to get home, awaken Lee Chung and go through the ceremony. After what he had heard, he knew there was no time to lose if the demons of disaster were to be driven away before Chuck

Gardon and his men made their raid.

Wong shuffled on in the wake of Gardon and the others. They went through another long ravine, then began climbing among the rocks. The noise of the rushing water came nearer.

The moon was up now, and Wong had to be careful that he was not seen. The men ahead were talking again, and the wind carried their words to his ears.

"We'll take a little rest, then get ready," Gardon was saying. "Make up the burro's packs and put the dust and nuggets among the stuff, like I said. Have a little snack to eat."

NOW they were working down among the rocks, and Wong had to follow them because there was no other way to go. They were descending to the floor of the canyon. Wong could see the whitewater below tumbling over the rocks in the moonlight.

And he realized that he was in a trap. Gardon and his two men were ahead of him, between him and Lee's cabin. The canyon was narrow along here, and there was only one path, and the walls could not be scaled. To get out of the canyon and work his way around to the mouth of the creek would take hours, Wong knew.

Finally they came down to the path and went along it, the men ahead hurrying now. Wong dropped behind, shuffling cautiously over the rocky path. When the men ahead reached Gardon's cabin, Wong went into hiding behind some rocks, to watch for an opportunity to pass the cabin and go on home.

They entered the cabin and lit candles, and one man emerged before Wong could make a move. The man built a fire, put on a coffeepot, and sliced bacon into a skillet. Through the open door of the cabin, Wong could see Chuck Gardon and the other man making up packs.

The burro smelled the smoke of the fire and came wandering up the path from below, heehawing a welcome. The odors of boiling coffee and broiling bacon almost upset Wong's stomach because he was so hungry. He wished they would eat and all enter the cabin and close the door, so he could slip past.

The man at the fire called, and Gardon and the second man emerged and began eating.

"If Knowles and his men are intendin' to raid, they'll try it just before dawn," Wong heard

Gardon say. "We want to get down the canyon and hit them Chinese while they're dopey with sleep, finish it there quick as we can, and go on down to Madison's place."

"How about the Vigilantes?" one of the men asked again.

"There's a chance we'll have to take. Mebbe they're not out here yet. But, on account of this new strike, they may be. Mebbe they're in ambush. If they are, I hope Knowles runs into 'em first."

"Suppose we run into 'em, Chuck?"

"If so, there's only one thing to do, and you both want to remember it. Drop everything and run. We're the same as swingin' at the end of ropes if we don't."

"If the dust and nuggets are in a pack on the burro—"

"We'll take time to grab that stuff, then make a getaway. There's a trail up the side of the canyon a quarter of a mile this side of the cabin them Chinese live in. We'll use that, get over the hills, and back to Marysville. Mebbe folks'll think we never left there. And we'll get on to Frisco as fast as we can."

They finished eating, but did not go into the cabin. Outside, by the fire, they were making the burro's packs ready. Wong could not get past them unseen. There was no sort of cover between the cabin and the wall of the canyon. And the firelight, added to the light of the moon and reflecting from the rock walls, made it so light that even a shadow could have been seen drifting past.

Crouching behind the rocks, Wong tried to think of a way out of the trap. Instead, when he looked toward the cabin again, he found instead a new peril. The burro was wandering up the path directly toward Wong's hiding place.

Wong crouched lower. He regretted now that he had made a friend of the burro by giving him sugar.

"Get that burro and bring the jackass back here!" Wong heard Chuck Gardon howl to one of the men.

The burro was coming on, and the man after him. Wong hugged the ground in the shadows. If they found him, he was done for, he thought. He had no weapon on him except a sharp knife.

But the man after the burro did not suspect anything, evidently. He yelled at the burro, who trotted on toward Wong. Then the man ran, caught the burro and turned him back just in time. Wong began breathing normally again.

Beside the fire, the three men put on the burro's pack frame and began packing it.

"Don't forget that this flour sack holds the stuff," Gardon told the others. "If we run into trouble, we'll tell a yarn about our claim bein' no good, and that we're goin' over to the American River and try our luck. Nobody'll think of investigatin' a flour sack. They'd expect us to be packin' any gold we had ourselves."

Wong prepared to make a wild dash if they all went into the cabin. They would be starting down the canyon soon, he knew, and he must get ahead of them and warn Lee and explode the sacred firecrackers to drive the demons of disaster away.

Finally, Gardon led the others into the cabin and closed the door. That gave Wong his chance. He left the protection of the rocks and began running, bending almost double, his worn sandals making but little noise, and the sound of the rushing water drowning that.

HE CAME even with the fire, and the burro saw him and hee-hawed with evident delight. Wong sped past him and went on. The burro began following, no doubt thinking of sugar. Wong got to some rocks and dropped behind them just as Gardon opened the door.

"Catch that fool burro and fetch him back!" he called to one of his men. "He's carryin' the stuff! Somethin' must have made him loco."

Wong crouched in a state of terror until the man had caught the burro and led him back. Then he went on, keeping in the shadows. When he got around a curve in the canyon and was hidden from the sight of those at the cabin, he put on speed.

He reached home and shook Lee Chung awake. Gasping and panting, he poured out the story.

"We must shoot the sacred firecrackers," Wong said. "They will drive away the demons."

"I will hurry down to the Madison cabin," Lee Chung told him, "and let him know about this, while you shoot the firecrackers. Some of the Vigilantes are here. They caught a man named Knowles early last night, and three men with him. They were sluice box robbers. Madison and the Vigilantes will come to help."

"I thlink sacred firecracker maybe dlive demons away," Wong declared, remembering to speak "American."

Lee Chung hurried down the canyon trail. Wong washed his hands to purify them, unpacked the

firecrackers, and got them ready. He muttered certain incantations. He strung out one string of the firecrackers, ignited a sulphur match, and lit the end of the string.

The firecrackers were good and loud, and the explosions echoed among the rocks. Wong began shouting his incantation in a shrill voice, determined to frighten the demons away. He ran into the cabin and got a huge pistol Lee kept there, but which he had never used on the thieves because they had always caught him asleep. Running outside again, Wong fired the pistol. It made a deafening roar among the rocks.

Wong would have been startled then if he could have seen what was happening and heard what was being said a short distance up the canyon.

Gardon and his men, the burro following, had neared the cabin on Lee's claim. They had pulled up neck handkerchiefs for masks. Suddenly, the night erupted. Explosion blasted and roared along the rocky canyon walls. Flashes of flame were reflected on the rocks.

"Gunfire!" one of the men said.

"Knowles got there ahead of us, and the Vigilantes are after him and his gang!" the second added.

They heard shrill yelling, and the thunderous explosion as Wong fired the old pistol. Gardon did not hesitate.

"Back!" he ordered. "Travel fast. They may come this way. Get up the trail to the top—it's only a hundred yards back. Hit for Marysville. We don't want any of this. Let Knowles have it!"

"The stuff on the burro—?" one questioned.

"Grab the flour sack and come on. Let the burro go. No time to lose!"

But the burro was gone already. The explosions and the flashes of fire were too much. He stampeded, running down the trail toward Lee's cabin, bucking and kicking to get off the packs.

A rope broke as the burro neared the cabin. The flour sack holding the pokes of dust and nuggets

flew off to one side. Some of the cooking utensils dropped off also.

Wong had just lit the second string of firecrackers. They began exploding. The burro turned and rushed back up the trail, went past Gardon and the men like a streak, and continued. The three let him go. They were scrambling up the trail frantically, to get out of the canyon and away.

Lee Chung came back with Madison and several grim-looking men who were heavily armed.

Wong was dancing around excitedly.

"Velly loud sacred firecracker," he told them. "I think they drive demons of disaster away."

"You stay here with Wong, Lee," Madison instructed. He turned to the men with him. "We'll go on up the canyon and see if Gardon and his two men are in their cabin. If they are, we'll drive 'em out of the district."

They started on their futile errand, for Gardon and his men at that moment had reached the top of the canyon wall and were on their way to Marysville.

Wong was tired and hungry, but happy. Lee Chung started to build a fire to cook food. Wong wandered a short distance up the trail, listening to the sounds in the canyon.

But soon he came rushing back, holding a flour sack and shouting for Lee Chung.

"Look!" he cried. "Find this beside trail. Here is the poke they stole from you. Here is the little package of nuggets. Here is more gold in little sacks. Not only did the sacred firecrackers drive away the demons of disaster, but the gods make the burro drop this sack at our feet, and we have the stolen gold and some extra. Perhaps that is because I gave the burro sugar. The gods like men who are kind to animals."

"The gods at times have what seem to us to be strange ways," Lee Chung told him, "but they are always profitable. Come and eat your rice and pork and drink your tea."