

Wang Foo's Right Eye

By CARL GARRET HODGES

THE telephone on police headquarters desk rang sharply. Desk Captain Boyle pulled it down lazily and put it to his ear. "Police Headquarters. What? Number 32? The devil you say! When? All right. I'll send Lannigan."

He hung the receiver on its hook and motioned toward a group of detectives lounging on a bench near the wall. One of the men rose and approached the desk.

"Do you want me? I heard you talking to 32."

Boyle chuckled.

"Yes, I want you. Somebody's croaked a Chink over on 32's beat. Better go over and take a look. Chinks are your specialty."

Lannigan grinned.

"I don't stick up for the yellow devils, but I don't believe in sticking a dagger into anybody. Knifed, wasn't he?"

"I believe so," Boyle nodded.

Officer 32, named Ryan, was waiting by his call-box when Lannigan walked up. He got down to business at once.

"Where'd it happen? Where's the Chink? Any evidence?"

Ryan gave the details.

"Over in front of Wang Foo's laundry. Knifed in the back. Dr. Haxell is the only one who saw anything."

By this time Detective Lannigan and Ryan had arrived on the scene of the crime. A crowd had gathered on the sidewalk and were kept away from the body only by a threat of the nightstick in the hands of Ryan's "beat partner," O'Rourke. Ryan entered the circle of people that hid the body of the dead Chinaman, and addressed O'Rourke:

"All right; here's Lannigan."

O'Rourke grinned. "Glad of it. This gang ain't got much sympathy for a Chink. They don't see why we should object to their killing off a few."

Lannigan knelt over the body of the murdered Chinaman. He lay sprawled over the dirty sidewalk, arms crushed under him, face down. He wore only the cheap, flimsy cotton shirt and trousers common to their race. One foot was bare, and the slipper that had covered it was lying beside the fireplug. A dark smudge stained the back of his

white shirt on the left side. Protruding from the center of the stain was the handle of a knife. Lannigan pulled it out. He muttered to himself:

"Plumb through the heart. Dead when he dropped."

The knife was long and slender, but made of excellent steel. It was more a stiletto than a knife. Lannigan dropped it into his pocket, determined to examine it for fingerprints a little later. Lannigan looked up at Ryan.

"How about Wang Foo? Any relatives?" he asked.

Ryan shook his head.

"No; all alone as far as I know. Ran the shop by himself, and never had any visitors."

Lannigan rose to his feet.

"All right You can take him to the morgue. You said something about Dr. Haxell being a witness. Where does he live?"

Ryan pointed down the street.

"Three doors down. Same side of the street. He said he'd tell you everything he knew."

Ryan and O'Rourke left with Wang Foo's body, and Lannigan walked down the street to Dr. Haxell's. The doctor admitted him at once, and escorted him into his office. Lannigan seated himself, and Dr. Haxell leaned on the edge of his desk. He was a well-built man, who possessed the clear, deep-set eyes of a thinker. Lannigan liked him at once.

Dr. Haxell gave a clear, concise account of everything he had seen.

"My office hours are from two to four, and from seven to nine. I keep no assistant, and consequently when I am not here I am compelled to lock my door. To cut a long story short, at seven this evening when I unlocked my office door and turned on the light at the head of the steps, I happened to glance down the street. Wang Foo was coming out of the door of his shop. He walked to the corner and dropped something in the mailbox. He returned, and was about to enter the door of his shop, when a figure darted out from behind a cart near the curb. He raised his arm. I could see something glitter in his hand. He struck. Wang Foo crumpled up and fell. I ran down my steps, and

dashed down the street toward them. Wang Foo's assailant had knelt by the body, and was trying to turn it over. He saw me, got up and ran. I lost him in the darkness. And that's all I know."

Lannigan thought for a moment.

"Did you know who Wang Foo's assassin was? Did you see his face?"

Haxell shook his head.

"No. As you probably know, Wang Foo's shop is not brilliantly lighted. I could not see the features of either of the men. The only way I could distinguish between them was by Wang Foo's walk. I wouldn't swear to it before a jury, but I think Wang Foo's assassin was masked."

Lannigan nodded. "That doesn't explain anything. Where is the motive? Wang Foo wasn't killed just because someone felt like killing him. There was a reason."

Dr. Haxell ventured a suggestion.

"Do you suppose that letter he mailed had anything to do with it?"

Lannigan shrugged.

"It may have, but I doubt it. I believe the motive was robbery."

"Robbery?" Dr. Haxell gasped. "What did Wang Foo possess that any one would be willing to commit murder to obtain?"

"You never can tell about a Chink," Lannigan smiled. "They're a queer race."

"You searched Wang Foo's clothes, didn't you?" Haxell asked.

"Not much to search. Didn't have much on."

"What's your idea of the crime?"

"My idea may be all wrong, but I believe that Wang Foo was killed to obtain something that was supposed to be in his possession. Either Wang Foo did not have the thing the assassin was after, or else the assassin got away with it. I don't know which it is."

"The idea of Wang Foo having anything valuable strikes me as queer. I had to wait over a year for my pay."

"What did you have to do with Wang Foo?" asked the officer.

"It happened last August. Wang Foo's shop was across the street then. The building was burned down and somehow Wang Foo's right eye was gouged out. I put in a hollow glass one for him. He was almost a year paying me."

Lannigan jumped up from his chair as if he had been shot. "My God, man, come along. We may be

too late as it is. I've got an idea of the motive."

Haxell followed Lannigan outside and down the street. The crowd in front of Wang Foo's had long since departed, and the shop was dark. The detective passed it without a sideward glance. He was walking rapidly, and it was all the doctor could do to keep up with him. At the call-box on the corner, Number 32 was phoning in his hourly report. Lannigan stepped up to him.

"Come along, Ryan, I need you. Where did you take Wang Foo's body?"

Ryan closed the call-box.

"Claver's Morgue. What's up? Found anything yet?"

"Not yet, but we may before the night's over," Lannigan spoke gruffly. "Take us to Claver's Morgue, and get us in without showing a light or making a noise."

"That'll be easy. Claver always leaves the back door open so we can get in without making a noise whenever we bring a body."

Lannigan only smiled, and said "Good!"

The three men moved silently among the litter that strewn the alley by the side of the morgue. Ryan showed the way. He opened the door without a sound. The men entered in silence, and Ryan led the way toward the front between grim aisles of caskets and slabs. They were awestruck. Dusky shapes took form on all sides. Lannigan wanted to pierce the ghostly murk with his flashlight, but knew it would ruin his chances for success. It was all they could do to keep silence in this storeroom of the dead.

They had not made a sound. Ryan was in the lead. Lannigan and Haxell moved side by side. They watched the dim shape that moved ahead of them until Ryan stopped. The other two bumped into him. Then Detective Ryan pointed into the dark and spoke in a scarcely audible whisper:

"That's Wang Foo's body on the table there."

The others could see nothing. Lannigan gave a direction:

"All right, Ryan; get out your gun and your flashlight. When I speak your name it will be a signal for you to flash it. I am expecting a caller before the night's over." He shuddered. "What a terrible place to receive him in."

The three took up various positions so that they could wait in comfort. Now that their eyes were accustomed to the darkness, various objects were dimly visible, and they could distinguish the

garment that covered Wang Foo's body. They appeared ghostly in the semidarkness. Caskets and the dull shapes of marble slabs loomed on all sides of them. Ryan crouched at the side of the table on which Wang Foo lay. Haxell sat on a box at one end, and Lannigan, with an automatic on his knee, crouched at the other end, behind a casket. The side opposite Ryan, that nearest the alley door, was left open for Lannigan's prospective caller. They waited for what seemed to be hours, heard every beat of their hearts, and the tick of their watches sounded like the blows of a hammer. The silence was terrible. They were in the presence of death, awaiting they knew not exactly what. A rat scurried across the floor, and a board squeaked. Way off in the distance a policeman's nightstick sounded on the sidewalk. The silence was getting nerve-racking.

Suddenly Lannigan said:

"Sh-h!"

A tin can rolled in the alley. Eternities seemed to pass. Not a sound. The men waited in the room of death with bated breath. Then a hinge squeaked, but there came no other sound. Lannigan felt a breath of damp air against his cheek. That would be caused by the closing of the alley door. Yet there was no sign of life. Nothing but a vague feeling that some Thing was feeling its way toward them in the darkness. Then a shadowy shape loomed up in the darkness and came closer and closer. Haxell wanted to swear, Lannigan's nails bit into his palms and drew blood, and Ryan's teeth clicked together. The shape hesitated. The rat scurried back to its hole. The shape advanced. A faint odor of alcohol filled the air. Lannigan didn't blame the shape for bolstering up his courage with liquor. Another step the shape advanced; another and still another.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

The shape trembled at the song of the clock. Then another soft, stealthy step in the darkness, and it was at the table where it bent over the body of the dead Chinaman. Hands groped forward and searched. They pressed downward. Like a shot a ringing cry split the darkness.

"Ryan!"

A gleam of light shot out of Ryan's flashlight across the table. The shape panted something as the light found his face. Lannigan gasped. It was Boston Frank, the thug and gunman. His hand flew to his hip-pocket, but Lannigan shouted a warning.

"I've got you covered. Hands up!"

The crook obeyed. His hands went aloft fast. Lannigan walked around the table and flashed his light on the face of Wang Foo. The right eye socket was empty.

Then the detective turned to Boston Frank.

"Show me your hands."

The crook lowered his hands and extended them toward Lannigan, palms upward. In his right palm lay Wang Foo's right eye. In his left lay an immense blue-white diamond.

Lannigan took the diamond and dropped it into his pocket. The eye he held under the ray of his light. It was a veritable shell. Wang Foo had probably hollowed it out himself, judging from the crudeness of the work.

The detective now spoke to Frank.

"We've got you dead to rights. If you tell us everything it may help you a bit."

The thug hung his head. A silvery moon peeped into the window and threw the shadow of the bars across him. He shivered and told everything.

"Wang Foo was the head of a gang that was interested in smuggling precious gems into the States from Canada. There were others in the gang. I won't tell you who they are. It was my part of the game to cross the border with the stones and bring them to Wang Foo. He disposed of them. I was supposed to get ten percent of what he realized on them. Yesterday I discovered that he had been holding out on me ever since we worked together. I asked him to come across. I didn't try to force him. I only wanted what was coming to me. Wang Foo refused to listen. I knew that he kept anything of value in the way of a gem in that hollow right eye of his, and I intended to get it. Tonight I knifed him. I didn't want to kill him. Before I could get the diamond Haxell butted in. That's all there is to it. Wang Foo's dead, but I'm damn glad of it. How did you know I was coming here?"

"I didn't know, but I reasoned that Wang Foo wouldn't want a hollow glass eye unless he wanted to hide something valuable in it, and I figured he was killed for that valuable. As Haxell scared off the murderer before he could get what he was after, it was easy to assume he would sneak in here to rob the corpse. That's why we were laying for him to make his appearance here. And you are the man."

He snapped a pair of handcuffs on the crook, gripped him firmly by the arm and added savagely:

"Come along."