

*Wherein the suave James Lee Wong,
under-cover man, encounters a murder
mystery, and overlooks the evidence in
favor of a quiet little talk—*

In Chinatown

By Hugh Wiley

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GANNAM

THE telephone records show that at 8:15 in the morning long-distance rang through from San Francisco to Sunnymount with a call from Olga Saratov to Frank Russell.

Sunnymount is thirty miles south of San Francisco. There was a five-minute hitch in the long-distance call and this was due to the fact that Frank Russell's telephone was an unlisted number. Presently, the Palo Alto supervisor rigged things up so that Mr. Russell received Olga Saratov's call.

"I want to see you as soon as you can get here," the Russian woman said.

"Olga! I am delighted to hear your voice. Where are you? When did you get to San Francisco?"

"I have an apartment at 9900 Pacific Street," Olga Saratov said. "Apartment seven. When can you get here? Is Hans Ritter still a friend of yours?"

"Not later than ten," Mr. Russell said. "Hans is still a pal of mine. I will start as soon as I get dressed."

"You're not dressed?"

"Just getting up. I'll be there at ten."

Mr. Russell had promised himself the rare luxury of staying in bed until noon. On the bed, at his right between him and the teakwood stand on which the telephone stood, there lay an accumulation of reading matter. Two numbers of the China Journal curled about a flat number of Antiquity. The third quarterly

issue of the American Geographical Review lay above Egypt As a Field for Anthropological Research. Under these was a catalogue of ancient Chinese porcelains and then, in the lower strata, consecutively came Goddard's Kato Texts, a monograph on Korean mortuary pottery, Edwin Barber's Tulip Ware of the Pennsylvania-German Potters, three book auction catalogues of the Anderson Galleries in New York, and a much worn copy of South Wind.

The morning mail had come in and to the left of the literature there lay an assortment of letters that Mr. Russell's Japanese cook had brought up with his breakfast tray.

Dressing, "What a fool I am," the writer reflected. "Why should I have to doll myself up and drive to San Francisco at this moment? . . . Why is it that something always gums up the game with a lot of female visiting firemen!"

HE WAS sorry then for these unkind thoughts. "Olga is a good egg," he said to himself, whamming a razor blade through a two days' growth of beard. "I shouldn't be such a selfish pig. Maybe she really needs me. She sounded serious enough . . . I wonder what she wants with Hans Ritter."

When he had dressed, "I will be gone all day," he said to his Japanese cook. "I'll probably have dinner in San Francisco and be back late tonight or tomorrow morning."

A frown of disappointment lay on the face of the Japanese servant. "Berry fine ramb kidneys."

"Eat them yourself," Mr. Russell directed. "Lamb kidneys get nephritis in the tepid atmosphere in that refrigerator. You'd better get the ice off the coils of that machine before it becomes a hothouse."

"Berry fine ramb kidneys," the Japanese insisted.

Russell got into his car. He looked at his watch. The time was 9:15. The lights were against him at six crossings en route to San Francisco; a funeral had the traffic stopped at the cemeteries; a construction crew blockaded him at Colma, but he landed in front of Olga Saratov's residence at 9:55. He looked at his watch again. He realized that he must have broken various traffic regulations. "Forty minutes! That's not bad time through that traffic. . . . I shouldn't drive so fast. . . . I wonder what Olga wants."

He got out of his car. He locked the ignition and put the key in his left-hand vest pocket alongside of the thin watch that he carried. "She sounded sort of Sarah Bernhardt. I hope she hasn't had a relapse of love's young dream."

He walked into the entrance of the apartment house and fumbled around with the cryptic mechanism of push-buttons and the concealed telephones with which such places are equipped. He pressed the button opposite Olga Saratov's name. Ten seconds later the buzzing mechanism of the lock in the front door sounded as a signal for his



entrance. He walked through the doorway and made his way to the elevator, wherein, guessing at the mathematics of apartment house numbers, he jabbed button Number Seven. When he had escaped from the elevator he found himself in an entrance hall from which, save for the elevator, there was but one exit. He pressed the button in the framing of the door.

WHEN the door opened Mr. Russell faced a Chinese cook who had left his service three cooks back. The cook's name was Wong Lok. Following Wong Lok there had been a female refugee from Poland who had lasted ten days. The female refugee had given place to Sugi Matsuta. Mr. Matsuta, leaving suddenly for Japan after two years' service, had replaced himself with one of his countrymen who was the present

incumbent. Of these various servants Wong Lok was the best cook and Sugi Matsuta the most generally efficient servant.

The wide vestibule of Olga Saratov's apartment narrowed to a hallway which led back to a dining-room. A five-foot doorway in the left wall opened upon a long living-room. Mr. Russell got a flash of this layout but in his surprise at meeting Wong Lok his survey of the scene was recorded without much attention to detail.

He held out his hand to his former Chinese cook. "What are you doing here?" he said. "When did you come back from China?"

Smiling only with his mouth, "How you, Mis' Russell?" Wong Lok asked, speaking coolie pidgin. "Long time no see you. You ketchum large story?"

Answering this with another ques-





tion, "What are you doing here?" Mr. Russell asked. "Are you working for Miss Saratov?"

"I cookum lilly bit," Wong Lok answered. "You likee talk lady? She sit down in sun porch. You go through large room you see him." Wong Lok bowed and with a gesture of his right hand he indicated the route through the wide living-room along which Mr. Russell would travel to find Miss Saratov.

Wong Lok put Mr. Russell's hat on a table against the east wall and with a pleasant nod toward his former master he turned and walked down the hallway.

Midway of the living-room Mr. Russell announced himself with a casual call to Olga Saratov. "Olga! Hello, globe-trotter. Where are you?"

There was no reply to this. Ten feet farther along his route, looking into the

Inspector Coyne gave one look at Olga Saratov. "Telephone the coroner's office," he said to one of the policemen who had accompanied him

colorful interior of the sunporch, Mr. Russell saw Olga Saratov. She was lying in a long wicker chair. Her head, resting on a yellow cushion, lay so that her face was turned toward the streaming sunlight. Russell called to her again. "Olga, my dear! It's good to—" he began, and then he saw against the yellow surface of the cushion under her head a blackening stain of blood. A stream of blood had flowed from her shoulder to the finger tips of her right hand, widening to a ten-inch pool where her fingers touched the green carpet.

Mr. Russell halted. "Olga!" he said. Then, seeming to lack breath enough to speak her name aloud, "Olga," he whispered. . . . "She's dead!"

Over the telephone to police headquarters: "A woman has been killed," Mr. Russell reported. "9900 Pacific Street, Apartment Seven. . . . My name is Frank Russell."

"What's the woman's name?"

"Her name is Olga Saratov."

"How do you know she was killed?"

Mr. Russell was conscious of a sudden flash of anger. Without answering the question, "Hurry up," he said. "I'll be here when your men arrive."

He hung up the telephone and called loudly for Wong Lok. No voice answered him. He explored the kitchen of the apartment and the three bedrooms. Wong Lok had disappeared.

INSPECTOR COYNE of the homicide squad gave one look at Olga Saratov. "Telephone the coroner's office," he said to one of the policemen who had accompanied him. To Russell, "How long have you been here?"

"Not over twenty minutes."

"Who let you in?"

"A Chinaman. A Chinaman named Wong Lok. He used to work for me."

"Did you know the dead woman?"

"I've known her for ten years."

"Where's the Chinaman?"

"He must have left right after I arrived. As soon as I saw what had happened I looked for him."

"Why did you hide the gun?"

Russell felt the blood surging through the veins in his throat. "What gun are you talking about? Inspector, I don't like that question!"

"Show him the gun, Casey."

Officer Casey produced a .45 automatic. "This was lying under the rug over by that chair," Inspector Coyne explained. "Why did you hide it?"

"I never saw the gun before."

"Why don't you want the dead woman to be booked as a suicide?"

"She isn't a suicide. She was murdered."

Inspector Coyne smiled thinly at Russell. "I think so too. You'd better come down to headquarters with us, Mr. Russell."

"I'll drive down right away. My car is out in front of the house."

"One of the boys will bring it down. You'd better ride along with me."

AT HEADQUARTERS Inspector Coyne held his fire on the problem of booking Frank Russell. "The woman had quit bleeding by the time we got there," he explained to the chief of the homicide squad. "If Russell is telling the truth she was killed half an hour or so before he showed up. She telephoned him at 8:15. He could have been there at nine o'clock."

"What's the Chinaman angle sound like to you?"

"She's had a Chinese cook for a couple of weeks."

"Round him up."

"We're working on it."

"What about the gun?"

A clerk from the telegraph room came in with a wire that contained some interesting data on the gun. He handed the message to Inspector Coyne.

"I'm not a bad guesser," the inspector said when he had read the message. "The Army people identify the gun from the serial number. It was issued to Captain Frank Russell in San Francisco a week before his outfit started for France in 1917. It's still his gun."

"That makes it tough for Frank Russell. We'll book him 'en route' until the district attorney can do his stuff. Get Russell in here."

Facing Inspector Coyne and three other members of the homicide squad, Frank Russell realized that he con-

fronted a new menace. Inspector Coyne showed him the .45 automatic. "This is the gun that was used to kill the woman. The bullet that killed her was fired through the barrel of this gun. You told me you'd never seen the gun before, didn't you?"

"To the best of my knowledge I never saw the gun before."

"It was issued to you in 1917 when you went to France. Think it over. . . . That's all, Russell. You'll have to stay here for a while. The charge will be first degree murder when the smoke clears away. Think it over."

LEAVING Olga Saratov's Pacific Street apartment, Wong Lok headed for Chinatown. On Grant Avenue, near the corner of Jackson Street, in the heart of this colony of his countrymen, Wong Lok sought sanctuary in the Cave of Harmony.

The Chinatown squad and a few of the white and yellow public in general know the Cave of Harmony as a rendezvous wherein members of the Wong family meet to discuss their mutual affairs, to enjoy the glow that comes from libations of black brandy, and to seek spiritual or financial support whenever the frowns on the face of Milo Fogum up the game of life. As a matter of fact, the Cave of Harmony is a more complex structure than the first view of the central assembly room might suggest. A system of twisted, narrow hallways, stairways leading upward to apartments above the street, stairways leading to subterranean apartments, telephones, an electric signal system, a treasure room, a properly ventilated opium room, a wine cellar and a barber shop are included as integral elements of the refuge to which Wong Lok hurried subsequent to his departure from Olga Saratov's apartment.

AFTER greeting the old sentinel on duty in the Cave of Harmony in the slow phrases of the ritual of Right Conduct, "I must speak at once with James Lee Wong," the refugee declared. "You have not seen me. I am not here."

The elder Chinese removed his spectacles and bowed to Wong Lok. "A wise man understands a nod," he said. "At the moment our friend is engaged. If you will rest in the Moon Cavern I will send him to you presently."

The Moon Cavern was an underground apartment lighted by a single forty-watt lamp. It was furnished with a table, three chairs, a mirror, a bed, a lithographed calendar that had been printed in Shanghai and a quotation board on which were recorded the international prices of silver, rice and silk. Here, after a delay of forty minutes, James Lee Wong found his countryman.

"I am sorry I had to hold you up," the late arrival said, speaking in English. "What's the layout?"

James Lee Wong, known on the federal pay rolls as James Lee, sat down at the table in the Moon Cavern and lighted a cigarette. He was six feet tall, and from where he sat he could blow the smoke out over the head of Wong Lok. After the first drag at his cigarette he let a cloud of smoke drift through the thin nostrils of his aquiline nose. He looked at Wong Lok through the narrowed level lids of his warm brown eyes. His face was suddenly the face of a foreign devil—a "Yankee."

Wong Lok sensed the fact that James Lee had masked his countenance. "The State Department has me jumping sideways on the Manchukuo affair," James Lee said. "I'm loaded down with work but what is one more stone to an overloaded donkey?" The glowing cigarette quivered in the long, sensitive fingers of James Lee's right hand. "What is your problem? I am a donkey who loves to

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A Piece for the Paper

The editor of the Clarion writes his own obituary notice—a rare opportunity indeed

By Don Marquis

ILLUSTRATED BY C. C. BEALL

OLD HENRY WATERS, who had been the editor of the Peak County Clarion for fifty years, sat at his desk with a neat stack of yellow manila paper sheets before him, writing. He was an old man, but his hand was firm; and his face, under its great shock of white hair, was firm also. Neither the lines on the paper nor the lines in his tanned and weathered countenance suggested failure or hesitation in spite of his more than seventy years.

"This is the obituary notice of the editor," wrote Mr. Waters with an unshaken hand. "He has written a great many obituary notices in the last half century, but none under such peculiar circumstances. He is writing his own obituary this time; he is doing it himself, because he wants to get the facts right. It occurs to him, in passing, that most people might be better satisfied with their obituary notices if they wrote them themselves. But few people do it, for few people have the advantage of knowing exactly when they are going to die.

"The editor of the Peak County Clarion is going to die within half an hour; possibly sooner. Possibly within a few minutes. At least, he has been told so. And he sees no reason to doubt it. For Squaw Potter is sitting directly across from him with a .45-caliber six-gun in his hand, watching every move he makes. Squaw Potter has always favored that particular weapon in his killings, and at the distance he couldn't miss.

"**P**OTTER came to town today for the express purpose of killing the editor, he says, and there doesn't seem at present writing any way out of it. He particularly objects to being called 'Squaw,' and the editor has been calling him that for thirty years, among other things, in nearly every issue of the Clarion. Now and then the editor has varied the epithet by calling him 'Skunk' Potter, and he says he hasn't liked that either. But his dislike has never inspired him to cease deserving the epithet.

"In the doorway between this office and the composing room is one of Squaw Potter's half-breed sons, with another six-gun in his hand. He is not only a half-breed, but a half-wit as well. He is the author of several unavenged homicides, as this community is aware. In appearance he reminds the editor of a carved wooden god he saw in Mexico a few years ago, although he is not as intelligent-looking.

"In the composing room itself where Bob Allen is setting this copy in type at the linotype machine—the first linotype machine ever to operate in Peak County, for the Clarion has always been in the vanguard of progress—is another one of Potter's half-breed sons, and he has a six-gun also. There have always been more six-guns than sense in the Potter outfit. The moron in the composing room is stationed there, as his part of the great Potter strategic campaign, to see that Bob Allen doesn't run

to the street and alarm the town. The one in the doorway takes this copy to the linotype in short takes, as I am writing it.

"The gorilla in the composing room is slightly less intelligent than the one in the doorway, and not so good-looking

either. He looks like one of those Indians that used to stand in front of cigar stores, but his head is sort of slewed to one side as if it had been run over by an auto truck.

"The Potter boys would be poor white trash, if they were white. The old man

is white, although he more or less married a squaw thirty years ago, and he isn't poor—he has got more money than nearly anyone else in this corner of this great western commonwealth, which he has accumulated over many years by fraud, crookedness, knavery and, when it served his purpose, murder; and he has got a good deal of political influence. But in his soul, in spite of his money, he is low-down white trash. He hopes to get away with this killing, as he has several others in the last thirty years, through his money and political connections. And maybe he will. He has got away with murder before this, and when I say murder I mean murder.

"Why are they letting me write this? I don't think either one of the Potter boys can read. The three of them came to town about two hours ago and began to get stewed, working their courage up for the killing. They will probably bump off my printer, Bob Allen, when they bump me off; and plant guns beside both of us. And a claim of having killed us in self-defense, plenty of perjury, and the corrupt political gang that rules Peak County will do the rest.

"I said to Squaw Potter when he came in: 'Squaw, you've come to kill me, I see that; and you know I haven't carried a gun in more than twenty years, because I don't believe in pistol-toting, so there's nothing to prevent it. But I want to write a piece for the paper first, and then you can go ahead.'

"He wanted to know what kind of a piece for the paper. I told him, a history of my life since I had been editor of the Clarion, and what I had done for this part of the state. Somebody would write it, and I might as well do it myself.

"The boys presented the idea to their father that the best plan would be to get the killing over first, and then let somebody else write the history of my life. But Squaw said to me: 'I'll bet there'll be something mean in that piece about me.'

"Of course there will,' I said. 'When did I ever write a piece for the paper without having something mean about you in it?'

"SQUAW is not only cruel and cunning, but he has the kind of stupidity that goes with his kind of cunning. And I saw that he didn't want to get this killing over too quickly. He wanted to take time and pleasure himself in it, and gloat over it; for he had been meditating it for a long while.

"You've said so many mean things about me in the last thirty years,' said Squaw, 'that there ain't nothing new you can think up.'

"You're afraid to give me a chance,' I said. 'I ain't afraid of nothin',' said Squaw, 'and never have been; and you know it.' And there is a certain amount of truth in that. Squaw has always had physical courage. As far as moral courage is concerned, he doesn't know anything about it, for he doesn't know anything about morality.

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