

# Tales of Chinatown

By

Sax Rohmer

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## The Daughter Of Huang Chow

I

"DIAMOND FRED"

In the saloon bar of a public-house, situated only a few hundred yards from the official frontier of Chinatown, two men sat at a small table in a corner, engaged in earnest conversation. They afforded a sharp contrast. One was a thick-set and rather ruffianly looking fellow, not too cleanly in either person or clothing, and, amongst other evidences that at one time he had known the prize ring, possessing a badly broken nose. His companion was dressed with that spruceness which belongs to the successful East End Jew; he was cleanly shaven, of slight build, and alert in manner and address.

Having ordered and paid for two whiskies and sodas, the Jew, raising his glass, nodded to his companion and took a drink. The glitter of a magnificent diamond which he wore seemed to attract the other's attention almost hypnotically.

"Cheerio, Freddy!" said the thick-set man. "Any news?"

"Nothing much," returned the one addressed as Freddy, setting his glass upon the table and selecting a cigarette from a packet which he carried in his pocket.

"I'm not so sure," growled the other, watching him suspiciously. "You've been lying low for a long time, and it's not like you to slack off except when there's something big in sight."

"Hm!" said his companion, lighting his cigarette. "What do you mean exactly?"

Jim Poland--for such was the big man's name--growled and spat reflectively into a spittoon.

"I've had my eye on you, Freddy," he replied; "I've had my eye on you!"

"Oh, have you?" murmured the other. "But tell me what you mean!"

Beneath his suave manner lay a threat, and, indeed, Freddy Cohen, known to his associates as "Diamond Fred," was in many ways a formidable personality. He had brought to his chosen profession of crook a first-rate American training, together with all that mental agility and cleverness which belong to his race, and was at once an object of envy and admiration amongst the fraternity which keeps Scotland Yard busy.

Jim Poland, physically a more dangerous character, was not in the same class with him; but he was not without brains of a sort, and Cohen, although smiling agreeably, waited with some anxiety for his reply.

"I mean," growled Poland, "that you're not wasting your time with Lala Huang for nothing."

"Perhaps not," returned Cohen lightly. "She's a pretty girl; but what business is it of yours?"

"None at all. I ain't interested in 'er good looks; neither are you."

Cohen shrugged and raised his glass again.

"Come on," growled Poland, leaning across the table. "I know, and I'm in on it. D'ye hear me? I'm in on it. These are hard times, and we've got to stick together."

"Oh," said Cohen, "that's the game, is it?"

"That's the game right enough. You won't go wrong if you bring me in, even at fifty-fifty, because maybe I know things about old Huang that you don't know."

The Jew's expression changed subtly, and beneath his drooping lids he glanced aside at the speaker. Then:

"It's no promise," he said, "but what do you know?"

Poland bent farther over the table.

"Chinatown's being watched again. I heard this morning that Red Kerry was down here."

Cohen laughed.

"Red Kerry!" he echoed. "Red Kerry means nothing in my young life, Jim."

"Don't 'e?" returned Jim, snarling viciously. "The way he cleaned up that dope crowd awhile back seemed to show he was no jug, didn't it?"

The Jew made a racial gesture as if to dismiss the subject.

"All right," continued Poland. "Think that way if you like. But the patrols have been doubled. I suppose you know that? And it's a cert there are special men on duty, ever since the death of that Chink."

Cohen shifted uneasily, glancing about him in a furtive fashion.

"See what I mean?" continued the other. "Chinatown ain't healthy just now."

He finished his whisky at a draught, and, standing up, lurched heavily across to the counter. He returned with two more glasses. Then, reseating himself and bending forward again:

"There's one thing I reckon you don't know," he whispered in Cohen's ear. "I saw that Chink talking to Lala Huang only a week before the time he was hauled out of Limehouse Reach. I'm wondering, Diamond, if, with all your cleverness, you may not go the same way."

"Don't try to pull the creep stuff on me, Jim," said Cohen uneasily. "What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Well," replied Poland, sipping his whisky reflectively, "how did that Chink get into the river?"

"How the devil do I know?"

"And what killed him? It wasn't drowning, although he was all swelled up."

"See here, old pal," said Cohen. "I know 'Frisco better than you know Limehouse. Let me tell you that this little old Chinatown of yours is pie to me. You're trying to get me figuring on Chinese death traps, secret poisons, and all that junk. Boy, you're wasting your poetry. Even if you did see the Chink with Lala, and I doubt it-- Oh, don't get excited, I'm speaking plain--there's no connection that I can see between the death of said Chink and old Huang Chow."

"Ain't there?" growled Poland huskily. He grasped the other's wrist as in a vise and bent forward so that his battered face was close to the pale countenance of the Jew. "I've been covering old Huang for months and months. Now I'm going to tell you something. Since the death of that Chink Red Kerry's been covering him, too."

"See here!" Cohen withdrew his arm from the other's grasp angrily. "You can't freeze me out of this claim with bogey stuff. You're listed, my lad, and you know it. Chief Inspector Kerry is your pet nightmare. But if he walked in here right now I could ask him to have a drink. I wouldn't but I could. You've got the wrong angle, Jim. Lala likes me fine, and although she doesn't say much, what she does say is straight. I'll ask her to-night about the Chink."

"Then you'll be a damned fool."

"What's that?"

"I say you'll be a damned fool. I'm warning you, Freddy. There are Chinks and Chinks. All the boys know old Huang Chow has got a regular gold mine buried

somewhere under the floor. But all the boys don't know what I know, and it seems that you don't either."

"What is that?"

Jim Poland bent forward more urgently, again seizing Cohen's wrist, and:

"Huang Chow is a mighty big bug amongst the Chinese," he whispered, glancing cautiously about him. "He's hellish clever and rotten with money. A man like that wants handling. I'm not telling you what I know. But call it fifty-fifty and maybe you'll come out alive."

The brow of Diamond Fred displayed beads of perspiration, and with a blue silk handkerchief which he carried in his breast pocket he delicately dried his forehead.

"You're an old hand at this stuff, Jim," he muttered. "It amounts to this, I suppose; that if I don't agree you'll queer my game?"

Jim Poland's brow lowered and he clenched his fists formidably. Then:

"Listen," he said in his hoarse voice. "It ain't your claim any more than mine. You've covered it different, that's all. Yours was always the petticoat lay. Mine's slower but safer. Is anyone else in with you?"

"No."

"Then we'll double up. Now I'll tell you something. I was backing out."

"What? You were going to quit?"

"I was."

"Why?"

"Because the thing's too dead easy, and a thing like that always looks like hell to me."

Freddy Cohen finished his glass of whisky.

"Wait while I get some more drinks," he said.

In this way, then, at about the hour of ten on a stuffy autumn night, in the crowded bar of that Wapping public-house, these two made a compact; and of its outcome and of the next appearance of Cohen, the Jewish-American cracksman, within the ken of man, I shall now proceed to tell.

II

## THE END OF COHEN

"I've been expecting this," said Chief Inspector Kerry. He tilted his bowler hat farther forward over his brow and contemplated the ghastly exhibit which lay upon the slab of the mortuary. Two other police officers--one in uniform--were present, and they treated the celebrated Chief Inspector with the deference which he had not only earned but had always demanded from his subordinates.

Earmarked for important promotion, he was an interesting figure as he stood there in the gloomy, ill-lighted place, his pose that of an athlete about to perform a long jump, or perhaps, as it might have appeared to some, that of a dancing-master about to demonstrate a new step.

His close-cropped hair was brilliantly red, and so was his short, wiry, aggressive moustache. He was ruddy of complexion, and he looked out unblinkingly upon the world with a pair of steel-blue eyes. Neat he was to spruceness, and while of no more than medium height he had the shoulders of an acrobat.

The detective who stood beside him, by name John Durham, had one trait in common with his celebrated superior. This was a quick keenness, a sort of alert

vitality, which showed in his eyes, and indeed in every line of his thin, clean-shaven face. Kerry had picked him out as the most promising junior in his department.

"Give me the particulars," said the Chief Inspector. "It isn't robbery. He's wearing a diamond ring worth two hundred pounds."

His diction was rapid and terse--so rapid as to create the impression that he bit off the ends of the longer words. He turned his fierce blue eyes upon the uniformed officer who stood at the end of the slab.

"They are very few, Chief Inspector," was the reply. "He was hauled out by the river police shortly after midnight, at the lower end of Limehouse Reach. He was alive then--they heard his cry--but he died while they were hauling him into the boat."

"Any statement?" rapped Kerry.

"He was past it, Chief Inspector. According to the report of the officer in charge, he mumbled something which sounded like: 'It has bitten me,' just before he became unconscious."

"It has bitten me," murmured Kerry. "The divisional surgeon has seen him?"

"Yes, Chief Inspector. And in his opinion the man did not die from drowning, but from some form of virulent poisoning."

"Poisoning?"

"That's the idea. There will be a further examination, of course. Either a hypodermic injection or a bite."

"A bite?" said Kerry. "The bite of what?"

"That I cannot say, Chief Inspector. A venomous reptile, I suppose."

Kerry stared down critically at the swollen face of the victim, and then glanced sharply aside at Durham.

"Accounts for his appearance, I suppose," he murmured.

"Yes," said Durham quietly. "He hadn't been in the water long enough to look like that." He turned to the local officer. "Is there any theory as to the point at which he went in?"

"Well, an arrest has been made."

"By whom? of whom?" rapped Kerry.

"Two constables patrolling the Chinatown area arrested a man for suspicious loitering. He turned out to be a well-known criminal--Jim Poland, with a whole list of convictions against him. They're holding him at Limehouse Station, and the theory is that he was operating with-----" He nodded in the direction of the body.

"Then who's the smart with the swollen face?" inquired Kerry. "He's a new one on me."

"Yes, but he's been identified by one of the K Division men. He is an American crook with a clean slate, so far as this side is concerned. Cohen is his name. And the idea seems to be that he went in at some point between where he was found by the river police and the point at which Jim Poland was arrested."

Kerry snapped his teeth together audibly, and:

"I'm open to learn," he said, "that the house of Huang Chow is within that area."

"It is."

"I thought so. He died the same way the Chinaman died awhile ago," snapped Kerry savagely.

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