

The Chinese Chicken

By Jon Frangipane

It was the usually funky, smelly, sizzling, early July morning in 1942. The wind had shifted easterly from the New Jersey pig farms and it was permeating every nook and cranny of the Italia family apartment in downtown New York City. The grinding sound of a garbage truck hurtled through the apartment window like a politician in heat.

“Dammit, Hashiell! Why you give me same flimsy excuse just to get out of house?”

Hashiell Italia, a Polish plumber and part-time amateur sleuth, had a probing mind and needed some answers. Wyshud Italia, Hashiell’s latest wife of two weeks, was a plain, simple woman, yet almost attractive in a plain and simple way, despite the fact that she was Ukrainian and impatient.

A man in his mid-forties and balding badly, with an atrophied right hand that hung uselessly at his side, Hashiell’s dream of becoming a big-time professional bowler and crime investigator was fading like a zucchini left on the back porch too long.

Howkin Italia, Hashiell’s brother and Wyshud’s new brother-in-law, had just moved in off the streets. He claimed he had a bad streak, but now lasting thirty-three years. Howkin was a huge hulk of a man, girth wise, but only standing five foot two, with eyes of blue. He had been born with a speech impediment that haunted him all his life, until one day when he began speaking perfect German, after being struck in the back of the head by a meteorite while being baptized by a religious cult at Lake Ishihawa in Japan.

Although Howkin had been a guest for only ten days, he had already easily seduced Wyshud, who was already fed up with Hashiell and his feeble excuses for his acne, and she obviously ready to rock and roll, even though she didn’t understand one word of German.

Hashiell’s blood pressure, upon reading the morning newspaper headline, turned his face into a gangrenous shade of purple. “Chinese Chicken flies the coop!” the newspaper declared.

The story detailed the disappearance of the valuable and coveted Chinese Chicken, a solid-gold replica of a pet chicken presented to the children of Ming Taizu, founder of the Ming Dynasty, in 1372. The Chinese Chicken disappeared toward the end of the almost 300-year reign, and its whereabouts were unknown until an Asian cleaning woman apparently absconded with the treasure after recognizing it, while dusting the apartment of Sylvia Glick, a New York socialite, who had painted the chicken white to match her sofa. After intense questioning, followed by “waterboarding,” Glick admitted to the police that she purchased the treasure ten years ago from a junk dealer in Beijing, but was unaware of its value.

"I'll be back in a jiffy," Hashiell yelled as he gulped a sip of black coffee and then flung himself out the door like a whirling dervish on crack, heading for his favorite chicken take-out, much to the joy and happiness of Wyshud and Howkin, who longed for more time together in the sack. (495 words)

"Did you hear about the chicken?" Hashiell asked the owner.

"What chicken you talk 'bout?" the perplexed Chinaman replied, as he chopped off a chicken's head.

"Why, the Golden Chicken, of course. It's all over the news!

"We no have your chicken. I have no radio, and T.V. hasn't been invented yet," he answered as he pulled out the chicken's innards.

"So, you're tellin' me you haven't heard about this Asian cleaning woman, about 50, who may possibly live here in Chinatown, and stolen the Ming Dynasty Golden Chicken? Here, take a look at this mug shot."

"You bark up wrong tree. You want real chicken, I have. The woman I never see."

"Here's my card, Buster. There's a big reward, so keep your almond-shaped eyes open, see?"

The Chinaman gave Hashiell a look only a Chinaman could give.

Hashiell returned a look only a Polish plumber and part-time sleuth with a probing mind could give.

"Don't forget to be on the lookout!" Hashiell called as he left.

Maybe I should check every Chinese laundry and Chop Suey joint in the city, he pondered.

A challenge like this comes once in a lifetime and Hashiell wasn't about to lose this chance for glory and fame.

He returned to the apartment and flew through the living room, failing to notice Wyshud and Howkin watching Mickey Mouse cartoons on an 8 millimeter Keystone movie camera in the nude, while having passionate sex on the sofa.

"I'll be in my office! He yelled. "I have a million calls to make."

Wyshud and Howkin didn't miss a beat, finally falling off the sofa in ecstasy, both screaming as they came to a earth-shattering climax. "Hey, keep the noise down, I'm on the phone!" Hashiell yelled from his office.