The Green Seal

By CHARLES EDMONDS WALK

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CHAPTER I.

To begin with, my curiosity in the ring was aroused, at first only mildly, by the gingerly way in which the public administrator handled it. It was an unsightly object, to be sure; but this did not account for the extreme caution with which he laid it up the desk between us. Indeed, to tell no more than the simple truth, if human expressions mean anything at all, I now know that he looked at it with mingled suspicion and fear.

I smiled and asked lightly: "Afraid it will bite you?"

He did not respond to my humor.

"Something of the kind, yes," was the sober reply.

Quite as a matter of course, then, I expressed a polite interest, sufficient to inquire what the thing might be.

"A ring," the public administrator told me, eying me with a sort of furtive intentness—"a finger ring."

"Doesn't look like it," I commented disparagingly. "Looks to me more like a broken off section of some thug's brass-knucks—only it doesn't seem to be brass."

"No," Mr. Unruh agreed, "it is not brass. Doc Hagan scratched off a bit of that black crust; underneath it's silver. But, Brice—my dear boy"—his glance grew peculiarly keen—"it is a thing of the devil!"

My interest mounted a degree, though my mind remained more or less occupied with the melancholy object of my errand. Dr. Hagan was the coroner, and even though brought into the talk only casually, suggested tragedy.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

Without replying directly, he went on:

"I don't know what associations it may have had for your father, but it must have held some very special value for him; some unusual sentiment that none of his papers that I have been able to find explains. I thought perhaps you might throw some light—give me some clue—"

"I'm sure I don't know," I broke into his groping utterance. "What makes you thing so?"

"Because he not only kept it in that little carved ivory box, but also locked in one of his safe-deposit boxes—the one containing the most important and private of his papers."

Mr. Unruh had my undivided attention now. Investing as they did the insignificant looking trinket with an importance far beyond anything it seemed to warrant, his concluding words certainly were strange. I sat staring at it, puzzled and wondering, and by-and-by glanced at the odd ivory box, which I had not noticed before. Then I reached forward to pick up the ring.

Quick as a flash, Mr. Unruh's hand shot across the desk and caught my wrist before I could touch the thing.

"Don't!" he cried in a tone so startling that I submitted out of sheer astonishment. "For God's sake, don't touch it! Wait till you have heard the rest!"

Satisfied, after a moment's alarmed scrutiny, that I was fully awakened to the ring's latent possibilities of danger, he released my hand, saying with a sigh of relief:

"What a start you gave me! You haven't heard the worst—not by a jugful!

"This very morning, while I was sorting these papers of your father's, quite unexpectedly I came across the small box. Just as I opened it to see what might be inside, in came Charley Yen, one of our regular Chinese court interpreters. Poor devil!"

The speaker's serious air was having its proper effect on me: I was fast growing impatient.

"Go on, for Heaven's sake!" I urged. "You make me feel like an accomplice in something criminal; as if something terrible were about to happen."

He solemnly nodded his head at me.

"Terrible is right," he said. He pointed at the ring. "Notice the set? No, No, don't touch it. It's jade—Chinese green jade. It looks clean and bright enough now; it was half hidden by a layer of dirt.

"I handed it to Charley, asking him what he could make of it. Twice he wet the ball of his thumb with his tongue and rubbed the set so he might examine it better. The second movement was the last he will ever make in this world. He saw the set all right and what's carved on it. I'll never forget the look on his face if I live to be a hundred!

"All at once the ring clattered on the desk. Charley crumpled up on the floor—right where you're sitting now. He didn't make a sound."

I confess that I shot my chair back in a jiffy.

"Dead?" I cried in horror.

"Dead," replied Mr. Unruh, simply.

"Why—what—how did the thing happen?" I stammered.

Mr. Unruh's gesture was as eloquent as his spoken reply.

"You can search me. Poison? Hagan couldn't find the least trace of any. Perhaps poor Charley licked it all off. Anyway—afterwards—before anybody thought of poison—a dozen people must have handled the ring, and not a blessed one of them sustained any ill effect." His next words again drew my attention to it.

"If you'll observe the way the thing's made—how the metal comes up all round the edges of the set—you may see how anybody could fool with the ring—even carry it in his closed hand—without the jade set touching the flesh. Then again it might. And there you are."

Taking chances with such a dreadful lethal instrument seemed very much like playing with a cobra.

Mr. Unruh was not yet through, however.

"That brings me to the strangest part of the whole affair," said he. "On the ball of one of Charley Yen's thumbs—the one he licked—was a print of the character carved on the set; green, too, it was, like the jade. Looked more like a bruise than a stain, though."

I shuddered. The very mysteriousness of the sudden fatality made it all the more shocking and awful.

Yet, for some unaccountable reason, the ring was beginning to have an uncanny sort of fascination for me. Where had the governor ever come by such an object? And had he been aware of its secret, but none the less deadly, potency?

With considerable pains not to let my fingers touch the set, as you may very well believe, I dropped the ring into the little carved box and snapped down the lid. It was stowed away with most of my other belongings, and in a day or two I was on my way back to New York to resume my interrupted studies.

The conversation just recorded occurred shortly after my father's death; and in order that you may follow the story I have undertaken to tell—I am sure before I am through you will call it an extraordinary one—it is necessary that I set down some facts about him and about myself.

You already know how I came to have the ring. Although personally I may be wholly unknown to you, as no doubt I am, my father's name instantly will be identified with a rhyming advertising catch-line which has stared America in the face, from all sorts of unexpected places, for more than a generation—

"Ferris Teas Always Please."

He was none other, in short, than the late Peter B. Ferris, whose chain of tea stores at one time dotted the country over.

Long before my father was married, he was "buyer" for a prominent New York tea and spice importing concern, and consequently spent most of his time in China, Japan, Ceylon and other tea-growing countries. His was a profession that calls for a highly trained knowledge, and his salary was correspondingly large. But he was too aggressive and possessed business acumen of too high an order to remain content in another's employ, no matter how large the salary; so by degrees he built up and controlled the vast business referred to.

The lady who afterwards became his wife and my mother he met at Hong-kong, the daughter of an English officer at the time stationed in the Anglo-Chinese city.

That I happened to be born in California instead of the Orient was little more than an accident. My mother, on a sudden impulse, accompanied my father during one of his rare visits home, and the journey was broken at San Francisco by my inopportune arrival and my mother's death. This period fell something like twenty-eight years ago, from the date of this writing.

The collapse of my father's business and his sudden death, the second event following the first in a sequence of immediate cause and effect, is a subject I need not enter into at length. Like many another man of excellent business judgment before him, in his later days he was led away by the glamor and lure of unwise speculations—gold mines, copper mines, Wall Street, and what-not. It is a form of obsession difficult if not impossible to account for.

It is sufficient to record that when the company's affairs were readjusted my patrimony consisted of means just ample enough to enable me to complete my post-graduate course at Columbia, to provide me with an adequate law library and a suite of offices in a desirable building, and to tide me comfortably over the empty period of waiting—providing that period should not prove too long—that is more or less every young lawyer's lot.

There was also a quantity of bizarre bric-a-brac, which represented my father's tastes as a collector of Eastern curiosities—and the queer ring.

So while Ferris teas still continue to please—the name has too great a commercial value to be abandoned—they please and interest me only remotely, since I haven't the slightest monetary concern in the huge enterprise that stands as a monument to the memory of Peter D. Ferris.

I chose Los Angeles as the most promising field in which to carve out my career. To save my life I couldn't now tell why, unless it was that father had regarded it as his home town—though Heaven knows he saw little enough of it. Anyway, for some such hazy reason I had specialized in the exceedingly intricate and complex Californian Irrigation Laws.

Also, at one time and another, Peter B. Ferris had owned considerable property in and about Los Angeles. Very little of this property, it may be added, descended to me. When you consider his exact business methods, as they had been in the season of his prosperity, it is strange that he should have died intestate; but such was the case, and I was the only child.

Under certain provisions of the Californian law, his affairs were taken charge of by the public administrator, who at some time years before, it appeared, had been a very good friend of my father's. When the estate was finally wound up, and he had been discharged by the Probate Court from further obligation to me, it was this gentleman, Mr. Unruh, who gave me the ring, as I have already described.

Mr. Unruh was sorry for me and tried to cheer me up. I was alone, without a living relative, that I knew of, and instead of being rich and independent, as I had securely expected to be, I was brought face to face with the stern realization that I would have to grub for my bread and butter. But I was not altogether dismayed. I even found heart after a moment to grin at him; thus forestalling, I suspect, a homily of advice and encouragement, which no doubt he felt it his duty to offer me.

My talk with Mr. Unruh—Charley Yen's death—my acquirement of the fatal ring—this all happened six years ago. And much can happen within the space of six years! For one thing, I had built up a desirable and lucrative practice in my special branch of the law. But all the circumstances that fell so soon after father's death had slipped far into the background of memory, there to remain until the morning of which I am now about to write.

This was the way of it. It was a day in April; to be precise, the fourteenth—calendar day in Court. In the morning I had occasion to go to my own safe-deposit box, and there quite unexpectedly I happened upon the carved box, where it had lain accumulating dust. The ring's mysterious potency, the tragic morning six years before, came back with a rush.

"Well!" I voiced my surprise. "What the dickens are you doing here?"

I carried it with me back to my offices.

During the idle hour after luncheon, with infinite precautions I took the ring from the box. Excepting the green set with its enigmatic symbol, where Charley Yen had licked it clean, it was tarnished—badly tarnished—incrusted all over with a sort of black scale, as if it had been through fire, or had lain a long, long time at the bottom of the sea.

For the first time I examined the set at leisure. The single character, which I took to be a Chinese or Japanese ideograph, naturally enough was quite meaningless to me. A detail to be remembered is, that is was carved into the jade, not in relief. But as I was destined to encounter its facsimile before many days had elapsed, under circumstances peculiarly tragic and mysterious, it may be well to have a look at it.

By and by I proceeded to rub the metal part with a chamois pen-wiper; but the exercise produced no appreciable effect. Emery-paper, manifestly, was indicated for this job. I rubbed harder. Then I was interrupted by the outer door opening.

The postman entered. He tossed some pieces of mail upon the table in the reception room. He uttered a pleasant salutation, indicative of a sprightly mood, as became a good genie, and then he went his way. All this was a familiar four-times-a-day occurrence to me. But through the doorway between the two rooms my attention was attracted and held by a parcel among the letters and papers. In size and shape it was suggestive of the ring-box.

Stub, my office-boy, had not yet returned from his noontide outing, and moved by an odd, incomprehensible curiosity, I went myself and fetched the parcel back to my desk.

I quickly had the wrapping off. Imagine my amazement when the counterpart of the ivory box stood revealed before me!

For several minutes I painstakingly compared the two, slowly scrutinizing with the aid of a reading-glass every minute line of the finely engraved pattern. My untrained eye could not detect a shade of difference to distinguish the one from the other.

Then it occurred to me to look inside the second box. Did it also contain a strange, outlandish instrument of death, a duplicate of the first?

I lifted the lid and caught my breath sharply.

In a blaze of multi-colored coruscations, there rolled out upon my blotting-pad a diamond as big as a hickory-nut!

(To be continued.)

SMART CLOTHES FOR THE YOUNG GIRL.

The plaited skirt for the young girl is proving a great success, if we may take the great number seen at the summer resorts as a criterion. When the whole dress, shirtwaist and skirt, is made in plaited effect, the result is very pleasing indeed. This dress, Ladies' Home Journal Pattern No. 8988, has a raised waistline, and consists of a waist opening in front with yoke finished with a turn-down collar, full-length sleeves with open cuffs, and a fitted lining, a seven gore skirt, perforated for deep hem facing. The pattern cuts in size 14, 16, 18 and 20 years, requiring in size 16, 11⅝ yards 36-inch material.

Ladies' Home Journal Pattern No. 8980 is a Ladies' and Misses' Peplum Waist, opening in front with roll collar or Quaker collar and full-length or shorter sleeves, and a circular peplum. The pattern cuts in size 32 to 44 inches bust measure. Size 36 requires 3⅜ yards 36-inch material.

Pattern No. 8981 is a Misses' One-Piece Skirt, gathered to a three-piece yoke, with slightly raised waistline. Suitable for flouncing. The pattern cuts in sizes 14, 16, 18 and 20 years. Size 16 requires 3⅜ yards 36-inch material.

Patterns, 15 cents each, can be purchased at your local Ladies' Home Journal Pattern dealer, or from The Home Pattern Company, 183-A George Street, Toronto.

THE GERMAN LIAR AGAIN.

Untruths Told About Britain to Deceive German People.

The most amazing untruths concerning Great Britain are daily circulated in Berlin for the purpose of deceiving the German public into the belief that Great Britain is in a state of panic. Here are a few of these gems which make up in humor what they lack in veracity:

"Sir John Jellicoe is to be tried for incapacity."

"The organ of the Labor Party demands that the whole Cabinet shall be impeached for participation in the war."

"The Indian troops in France were told before leaving India that they were being taken to Europe for exhibition purposes."

"Half of London is burnt down, and Zeppelins are always hovering over it. Plymouth has also been destroyed by fire, caused by bombs from the air."

"Mr. Asquith has fled from England, and is hiding in Ireland."

"The citizens of London now hurry hither and thither like scared mice because their battalions of football-kicking louts are melting away before the fire of the German artillery."

"Instead of blowing their victims from the mouths of their guns as they did in the Indian Mutiny, the British now employ the truly humane and gentle acting dum-dum bullets, with the approval of Lord Kitchenen."

"The French Government pays for the support of British troops, so that each man draws on a day on which there is no fighting four francs, while on each fighting day he is entitled to eight francs. The British are also completely clothed and fed by the French."

"The deeds of the German fleet are already causing the Lords of the Admiralty sleepless nights while on board the British ships fearful apprehension lurks in every corner."

"'Come into the army,' says the British recruiting sergeant to the youths. "You shall have a villa in Rome, a bungalo on the Mediterranean, and in two months you shall be King of the Belgians.'"

"As you like it"

"SALADA" TEA

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B 20

Cow Testing Associations.

The cow testing associations is a plan of co-operation among dairymen for the purpose of regularly and economically testing their cows for production of milk and butter fat. A usual estimate places the average production of cows at 175 pounds of butter per cow per year. In these days people who are familiar with dairying think in terms of butter fat, and if the above average be translated to fat it makes about 150 pounds. At 30 cents a pound, which has been the average price for the last three years, the annual income per cow is $45.

If the above figures are taken as a foundation, it is very apparent that there are many cows which are not paying the cost of their keeping. The use of the scales and the Babcock test has discovered in almost every herd tested some cows that do not pay the cost of keeping. If dairying is to be made as profitable a business as it ought to be and as it has a right to be under proper management, these robber cows must be apprehended.

There is no means of knowing what a cow is producing without weighing and testing her milk at regular intervals. A dairyman selling milk by colume may not be concerned in the butter fat content farther than is necessary to keep up to legal standard, but one who is selling butter fat is vitally concerned in the amount each cow produces. Each dairyman may test his own cows, but facing the condition squarely it is known that very few do. At a recent dairymen's meeting this point was raised—that a testing association was not necessary, because each man could test his own cows. The question was then asked: "How many present have Babcock's testers?" Twelve out of a gathering of 50 answered in the affirmative. In reply to the question, "How many of you who have testers use them?" only one answered in the affirmative.

The object of cow testing associations is to make the use of scales and Babcock machine a community affair—to unite dairymen into a partnership for the purpose of employing a trained man to visit each herd at regular monthly intervals and weigh and test the milk of each cow. At the end of the year, this man gives each dairyman a record of the individuals in his herd with little work or trouble to him and at the cost of about $1 per cow.

The tester weighs and samples the milk of each cow at the evening and morning milking and tests the combined sample for butter fat. Before leaving, he makes calculations so that he may leave with the dairyman the record of each cow down to date.

In European countries and some of the states in this country, one of the duties of a tester is to weigh and keep a record of food consumed by the cows. The cost to the dairyman for complete testing varies from 80 cents to $1.50 a year for each cow. This variation is due to the number of cows in the associations and to the size of individual herds.

DEATH OFFENCES IN ARMY.

Soldiers May Be Shot for Many Reasons on Active Service.

There are more than a dozen different offences for which a British soldier may be sentenced to death while on active service.

The first on the list of death offences applies to a commanding officer and reads, "Shamefully delivering up a garrison when in command of troops, without due necessity—punishment, death."

A soldier can be shot for throwing away his rifle in the presence of the enemy, for cowardice, or for leaving his commanding officer in order to plunder. If he forces his way past a sentry on active service he may be sentenced to death, or for assaulting any one bringing up provisions for the troops.

Soldiers are expressly forbidden while on active service to commit any offence against a resident of the country in which he is fighting under pain of death, nor may he break into any house in search of plunder, or discharge his rifle intentionally to create a false alarm on the march.

A soldier while acting as sentry who is found sleeping at his post may be shot. Any man causing or joining a mutiny is liable to be shot. Desertion or attempt at desertion while on active service is naturally a death sentence.

Letting Well Enough Alone.

"Madam," said a doctor one day to the mother of a sweet, healthy babe, "the ladies have deputed me to inquire what you do to have such a happy, uniform good child?"

The mother mused for a moment over the strangeness of the question, and then replied, simply and beautifully:

"Why, God has given me a healthy child, and I let it alone."

Whatever It Is.

"I don't see how they can afford to do it on his salary."

"Do you know what his salary is?"

"No, but I don't see how they can afford things, just the same."

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