THE GREEN STONE

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have given a better account of myself.'

"I scarcely knew how it happened, but in the excitement of the moment every trace of the street minstrel had disappeared; I was speaking to a kindly English gentleman, and within a few minutes, as I accompanied him to the railway station, I had confided to him all that had occurred to me during the year. Before we parted he gave me his name and desired me to call upon him the next day at an address in Westminster.

"'I am anxious to know you better,' he said. 'I think your affairs in skilful hands might be pulled into shape. And I owe you an explanation of my appearance here in the guise of a street fiddler.'

"I discovered that my musician was the big engineering contractor, John Everard. To him I think I owe everything. At the outset he insisted on being my banker, till my own ship came home. He saved my book from the wreck of bankruptcy. More wonderful still, he succeeded in having my play staged. I have never looked back since.

"One evening in spring, he took me into his study after dinner, and when our pipes had been lit, he loosened a thin gold chain from his neck and passed it over to me. 'I want you to look at this, Hildred; what do you make of it?' At the end of the chain there was a small green pebble enclosed in a little case of silver filigree which almost concealed various characters or symbols finely engraved upon it. 'Unless it is a charm or talisman,' I replied — and I make the guess because you are wearing it — I have no notion of what it may be.'

"'It is a talisman, a lucky stone,' said Everard. 'When I was traveling twenty years ago in India I fell in with an old Buddhist priest and was able to render him material service. I slept one night in his old pagoda among the crumbling images which had been the offerings of forgotten generations, and the next day the old man gave me the stone as a parting gift. So long as I wore it, he said, no serious mischief could befall me and I should prosper in all I undertook. He warned me, however, that abnormal good fortune always ended in disaster unless means were taken to avert it.

"I WAS incredulous, of course, but by some odd chance I had a marvelous run of luck. In all sorts of risks and dangers I bore a really charmed life, and everything I touched turned to success. That was all right and jolly enough, but at last my unfailing luck grew so uncanny that it frightened me. Do you remember that creepy story of Herodotus about Polycrates? His best friend was scared away by his eerie good fortune, and in the end he perished on the cross. Time and again I was tempted to drop the green stone into the sea, and take my chances like other men—but I didn't.

"Well, I cast about for some means to stave off calamity. Frankly, Hildred, the dread of the green stone made me a better and more kindly fellow than ever I should have been without it. But moderation and decent living and generosity hardly seemed a sufficient propitiation of the unknown powers that appeared to be watching me. This must all seem craziness to you, but to me it was a real and dreadful necessity.

"'It is curious,' he went on, 'what casual trifles influence us. Glancing over the papers one day I noticed a passage in a review of Asolando, in which Browning describes how the Emperor Augustus, at the height of his power, spent one day in the year disguised as a beggar in the streets of Rome. That was the beginning of my street fiddling. You may well look amazed. But even as a beggar my luck pursued me, and I saw that if I was to touch poverty twice a year and live on what charity gave me, I must go out without my talisman. You can't guess the struggle I went through to do that. Until that moment I had never realized how thoroughly I had passed into slavery to an unknown power. Still I did succeed in laying myself bare to misfortune and taking my human chances. So far, nothing worse than you know has happened to me.'

"He stopped abruptly; then, after a long pause, 'What would you do?' he asked.

"'If I may speak frankly,' I replied, 'you have put the answer into my mouth. I suppose there is no use trying to convince you that the luck of the stone is all an illusion.'

"'None whatever,' he said.

"'Do you not think, then, that safety from risk and the best fortune in the world are too dearly bought if they enslave a man to unknown powers?'

"He nodded silently.

"'Then, why hesitate?'

"'My dear friend, you don't know what the word *fear* means.'

"'What more have you to fear than the worst that can befall any of us? You ask what I would do. I would smash this devilish little thing into powder and drop it into the fire.'

"Everard took the talisman and looked at it curiously. 'There are queerer things in the world,' he said, 'than most of us imagine. I know you don't believe in the virtue or deviltry of this green stone, yet it was only yesterday that I heard a hard-headed old traveler say that there was a sort of primeval instinct in the great deserts which drove even men like himself to do things that were grotesquely unscientific, but absolutely right.'

"The conversation drifted to other subjects, and though we often met, Everard never referred again to the talisman. Two or three years later, he was run down in the streets and killed by a motor car. It was mentioned at the inquest that he was carrying a violin at the time, but probably no one but myself perceived anything curious in the fact that the accident took place late on Midsummer Eve."

A LUCIFER OF THE HOUSETOPS

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vaguely alarmed. No one spoke. It was all intangibly unpleasant, like a dream that is half nightmare, half grotesquely humorous.

Her silk dress rustled faintly as if she were about to move, but she stood still and never spoke at all; her receding, puckered chin quivered like a frightened rabbit's and for an instant her pale eyes grew yet rounder with sudden fear. Then, as abruptly, the pleased look came back, and for the first time she spoke:

"And so, you too believe?" she said. She tripped lightly a little farther into the room.

"Will you sit down?" I said awkwardly.

She slipped back into the depths of our battered morris-chair and half lay there, her feet not touching the floor and swinging to and fro with little heel clickings like an excited child's; she gave a sigh of anticipation:

"Tonight he will give the sign that is demanded of him! Did you demand it too? *I* did not; *I* have attained to the Nineteenth Phase.

SHE was fumbling with the clasp of the little bag, which seemed strangely heavy. The clasp undid suddenly and a twenty-dollar gold-piece dropped to the floor; there was the tink of others from the depths of the bag. She gave the coin no heed, but proudly drew out a thin, brass circlet:

"This I am entitled to wear!" she said.

I handed back the piece of gold, and she took it with a little titter:

"When he gives the Sign —" She bobbed her head vigorously and put the circlet and the coin back in the bag. Jocelyn called me to her side:

"You will have to see if you can get her home, or at least notify her friends where to come for her — if she can tell where she lives, that is."

"Madam," I asked gently, "won't you tell me where your home is?"

She looked at me in sudden, angry suspicion.

"Where are the others? How did you get in?" she challenged; and then coming closer, she shrilled: "*Do* you believe?"

"Of course I believe," I said soothingly.

"Then what is the Word, the Word, the Word? What is it! You are an impostor; you do not know!" She was trembling with her vehemence.

"I am here in my own house, Madam," I said, and then: "I think that you had better let me see you home —" There was terror in her eyes again, and she seemed not to have heard my offer, only my assertion.

"The wrong house — the wrong house!" she muttered over and over; then she turned suddenly and scurried swiftly out of the room.

"Stop her!" Jocelyn cried. "We must not let her wander about the city; you must catch her!"

We reached the street door almost at the same instant, but she was out on the steps before I could seize her. A man had just passed the house and at sight of him she called shrilly a name I could not understand — it had a queer foreign tang to it. At the sound of her voice he wheeled and came swiftly back, and she ran to him and made an unmistakable, though hurried, gesture of reverence. I stood in uncertainty, watching, puzzled. She spoke but a few words; the man hesitated an instant, then came slowly toward me; she waited.

"I hope she didn't give you any trouble? This sort of thing happens every now and then; I am her lawyer," he explained.

"Now that," I thought to myself, "is a lie." He was heavy set — not fat — a man of medium height, bald, with a smooth-shaven, pale, round face that was greasy like tallow; under each of his eyes hung a pouch, discolored, that advertized him to be ticketed for a long Journey.

"No," I answered mechanically, "she gave no trouble."

"I am glad of that," he said graciously. "And did she say anything; did she mention me at all? No?" He gave an assured, easy little laugh. "It's not always like that; sometimes she tells strangers great tales. Well, I'll just take her home. Good night to you."

He called the old lady and they went away together, she leaning forward and peering up into his face in a rapture that was reverent and awed. They went away in the direction from which he had come, and I watched them to the corner, where he gave me a polite wave of the hand — and there they turned west and disappeared.

I climbed the dark and clattering stairs. Jocelyn was silent until I finished telling of the man with the tallow-like face, then: "He did not seem to be looking for her, you said? And you did not ask why he was in this out-of-the-way neighborhood? You should not have let her go — you should not have let her! It all seems wrong."

"Yes," I assented sulkily, "it does seem wrong, all wrong."

Now that the sun had almost set, it seemed that the outer air must be cooler, that anything would be more cool than the vapid air of the close room. I raised the blinds and the sash and stared out over the river, which seemed in its coppery greens to be running hot. In the brilliant orange and vermilion first coat of the new iron bridge, in the hot flush on a late lingering cumulus cloud dropping down back of Long Island, in the listless droop of the yellow leaves of our one scrawny, misshapen tree, in everything, everywhere, noxious, pestilential heat.

The children with their fire-crackers had come back to the streets now that the setting sun gave promise of truce; some one on a side street set off a whole pack that sputtered finely for a minute or two then died away with a few vicious pops; I had all but forgotten that it was a gala day.

IT WAS dusk when we finished our simple meal. If the heat of the day had been stifling, now that it was night, and the brightness was gone out of the air, the oppression of gloom was terrible; the low ceiling pressed upon us, the close walls hemmed us in.

"Let us go out upon the roof," I said, "at least there will be space about us; it will not seem like a sepulchre." We climbed a wobbling ladder that led up out of a dusty closet and which ended against a heavy trap-door that fitted down over a coaming. I lifted the trap-door, and we stepped out amongst the chimney-pots on to the flat roof. It was no cooler, but for the first time we drew great, free breaths. There was a fine tone of vastness and freedom about it all that made us give little gasps of relief; it made us feel like stretching our limbs as if they had been held down in cramped positions. From the black river there came a damp smell and a soft lapping, swishing sound which somehow made the air cooler. We congratulated each other — laughed again.

Of the ten houses that once formed our row, the northern five had been torn down to give place to the new bridge; Jocelyn and I were the sole tenants of the middle house that remained; the two between us and the bridge were condemned and were vacant; the next house to us on the south was but lately vacated, and the house on the corner owned by people in more prosperous circumstances than most of their neighbors — was closed for the summer. There was not a more lonely row in all the city.

An unwonted silence blessed the place, a silence that could not be disturbed by fire-crackers which seemed mere fantasy of noise after the ceaseless clatter kept up night and day by