

The Jade God

By CLARISSA MACKIE.

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WHEN the good ship Tartary, bound from San Francisco to Shanghai, lay to at the mouth of the Whangpo river, Winston leaned eagerly over the rail as the landing tug made fast to the steamer and the stream of waiting passengers poured over the gangplank. Each one came under his careful scrutiny, and as the last one passed over he left his position and hurried on to the little tug, which was preparing to cast off.

There was an expression of relief on Winston's face as he boarded the crowded boat, and it grew in satisfaction as they cast off and proceeded up the muddy little tidal river toward



LEANED OVER THE RAIL AS THE TUG MADE FAST.

the city. He stood alone among the passengers, a silent, rather moody figure, clad in light tweed, with a cap pulled low over his forehead. He did not have an acquaintance on board, and the long voyage across the Pacific had been unbroken by any friendship made or acquaintance formed.

Puffing, snorting, luggage tugs rushed past them to relieve the Tartary of her burden. Awkward junks, with clumsy sails, wrestling against the strong tide, wallowed in their wake. The darting sampans, speedy launches and cormorant fishers all formed part of a scene that was familiar enough to Winston, and he watched it with lack-luster eyes.

At last they were ashore, and Winston had emerged upon the Bund with a feeling of intense relief. He jumped into a waiting carriage and was driven immediately along the beautiful boulevard toward the old native city of Shanghai. He passed through the American, English and French concessions, and as they passed for an instant before the city gate they entered its dark arch he signaled to the driver and alighted.

"I will walk," he said curtly. With that remark he disappeared within the gate and hastened rapidly down a dark and narrow street, paved with broken stones and filthy beyond description. With the directness of one who treads a familiar path he threaded the narrow streets, pushing his way through the throngs of blue bloused Chinese that blocked traffic at every corner. They swarmed in and out of the tiny shops, and in the bazaars the din of their staccato voices was deafening. Through it all Winston walked with unseeing eyes and unheeding ears. At last he paused before a tiny shop



A SILENT AND RATHER MOODY FIGURE.

tucked away in a maze of others, glanced furtively around and then bent his tall head and entered. A large Chinese emerged from a curtained interior and turned a bland, unsmiling countenance and dull little eyes toward him. "Where is it?" demanded Winston roughly in English.

The man made no response. He merely stared impassively into the face of the American.

"Where is it?" repeated Winston, this time savagely. He thrust a hand into his pocket and drew a small, shining revolver. The weapon fell into his hand easily, and his long brown fingers closed about it as he raised it toward the Chinese.

The man uttered a frightened squeal and dodged into the back room, with Winston close upon his heels. He crouched in a corner and fumbled at a box.

"Get up!" commanded Winston sternly. "Get up and answer my question!"

Slowly the man arose, and this time the impassivity of his face was broken by an ugly grin that distended his wide mouth from ear to ear. "I don't know where it is," he replied in English, thrusting his yellow, clawlike hands into the sleeves of his blouse and staring impudently into Winston's face.

Winston sat down on a stool and coolly leveled the revolver at the man. "I'll give you two minutes," he said grimly. "Now hunt till you find it!"

The man did not stir as he stood there. The American slowly counted the seconds that made the first minute. When he began on the second minute the wide grin slowly changed to an expression of cowardly fear; and as Winston counted fifty seconds the

man darted down into the corridor where he had crouched before and extended an object toward the American. Winston smiled joyfully, for the first time since he left San Francisco. The expression of care that had clouded his face lifted, and he threw back his stooping shoulders with a breath of relief.

The object which the Chinese extended toward him was a small image of the god of content. It was carved from dull green jade, and portions of its oily surface were worn smooth, as if by much handling. There was hatred in the eyes of the Chinese as he gave the image into Winston's hands. "How much this time?" asked Winston quietly as he thrust the weapon into one pocket of his coat and the green god into another.

The man suddenly named a price, which Winston paid without comment. Then he turned to go. "I've bought this from you three times already, Yung. Each time your agents in America have stolen it from me, and I have made a journey here to recover it. This is the last time, remember!" Then he left the Chinese standing among his shelves of curios, a strange smile creasing his yellow countenance. Winston then made his way leisurely back to the city gate, knowing that he was followed by several lithe, dodging figures. He kept furtive watch, however, and at last passed through the gate unmolested and entered the carriage which had waited for him. During the ride he sat with folded arms and thoughtful brow. Once he took the green god out of his pocket and surveyed it lovingly.

Jack Winston had come into possession of the green god some four years before the occurrence of the events related above. He had returned from a stroll through the bazaars of the old city, and as he entered the cool veranda of his bungalow he felt in his pocket for his matchbox. He had drawn forth the green god. Where it came from, how it got there, he never knew. He had found it there after his return from the bazaar, and as he looked at it curiously, examining the delicate carving of the hideous face, he experienced a feeling of rare exultation in its possession. He could not tell why he rejoiced at the discovery of the god in his pocket, but he was jealously careful that no one should know that he possessed it. He carried it hidden away in an inner pocket of his vest, and the small flat object pressing against his breast im-



"I WILL WALK," HE SAID CURTLY AND DISAPPEARED.

parted a feeling of utter satisfaction with himself and the world. Then he returned to America, and the first day he was in San Francisco he had lost it. It had disappeared from the curio cabinet in his study, and the loss of it fell upon him like a blow. He could not have told what fascination it held for him. He only knew that he wanted it above all other things and that he would move heaven and earth, if possible, to recover it.

I will not relate what means he employed to trace the theft of the green god. It is sufficient to say that he traced it across the Pacific to Shanghai, followed it to the old city, down to that little curio shop of Yung's, and finally bought it back at an absurd price. He could not prosecute the thieves, for they were unknown to him, and the impassive Yung was silent regarding the manner in which it had come into his possession. Winston felt a strange reluctance to admit his possession of the god, and so he returned to America with the god securely concealed in his belt. There it had remained for six months, and then one day it disappeared again.

Drawn as by a magnet across the ocean to that little shop in old Shanghai again, Winston dropped his business and again trailed the image to the hands of Yung, paying an exorbitant price for it, only to return to America and lose it a third time.

For the third time he had recovered his treasure, and now he hugged it lovingly to his breast and gazed over it with the eye of a lover. The dull green stone seemed to glow with life as he looked. A thousand glints of light sprang from the carving. He was still staring at it when the carriage drew up before the Shanghai club. He thrust the image into his pocket and ran up the steps and straight into the arms of Miller.

"Winston, by all that's good to look upon!" exclaimed the latter heartily as he wrung the hands of the tall American. "What the devil is the matter



A SMALL IMAGE OF THE GOD OF CONTENT.

fans swayed above the carved ceiling and thrust him into a chair. Then he sat down and looked at him.

"I came out on important business," explained Winston evasively. "I have heard of two other trips you have made since you went back to America," said Miller gravely—"two

other trips, during which you came and went silently, unobtrusively, and never once came to renew old friendships."

Winston hung his head, and a certain obstinate line deepened about his mouth. Still he made no response.

"What is it, Jack?"

Winston paled at the emotion expressed in Miller's voice. He and Bob Miller had been chums until—what had come between them? He tried to recollect that he had not thought of old friends since—why, since the green god had come into his possession the first time!

He drew out a handkerchief and lifted it to his perspiring brow. As he did so the little green god fell rattling upon the polished floor.

"Great Jove!" Miller had darted down and picked up the image. He



"WINSTON, BY ALL THAT'S GOOD TO LOOK UPON!"

thrust it behind him, clinched in his hand, and backed away from the infuriated face of Wilson.

"Hold on there, old man!" he cried, throwing out a restraining hand. "You can have it back when I get through saying what I've got to say! You can have it if you want it!"

"I do want it," returned Winston doggedly.

"Wait. Sit down again," Miller waited until his friend had resumed his chair, and then he sat down opposite, surveying him with gravely anxious eyes. The green god was clasped in his hands. "Until four years ago I was the owner of the jade god," he said slowly.

"You?" Winston ejaculated.

"Yes, I. I found it among my possessions in a most mysterious manner, and from that moment I had no peace of mind. It disappeared almost immediately afterward, and I trailed it feverishly, madly, until I found it, paid a price and took it home, only to lose it again later on and to recover it in the same manner. I can't tell why I wanted it. I am not a collector of curios, but so long as I had possession of it I was content. When I lost it I was almost murderous in my desire to recover it. The prices I paid for the jade god nearly ruined me. You helped me out many a time, Jack when I had lost it, and then one day I woke up, or some one woke me up."

"How?" asked Winston hoarsely.

"Told me the story. It's an old trick with Yung. The image certainly possesses some magnetic power that influences the owner to recover it at all hazards when lost. Yung smuggles it into the pocket of a gullible foreign devil, such as you and I are. We find it, yield to its fascination. Yung's agents steal it. We start in hot haste after it. Jealous lest some other should possess it, we pay a blackmailing price for it and lose it again, and so it goes on indefinitely until there is no more money to pay with, and then we lose it for the last time. That's what happened to me. You remember Jackson?"

Winston nodded. "Shot himself when his money gave out and couldn't get the god back again. I've lost all taste for the thing now. It can't fascinate me." Miller looked down at the jade image carelessly. Then his gaze became fixed, and a covetous smile spread over his



"FORGIVE ME, JACK. I DID IT FOR BOTH OF US."

face. He lifted his eyes with a cunning gleam at Winston, and the ferocity of the other man's glance startled him to sudden gravity.

"Come, Winston!" he shouted hoarsely. "Come with me, man!" He turned and dashed through the door and into the street, closely followed by Winston.

Straight toward the river he hurried, Winston at his heels, a curiously eager light in his eyes and one hand grasping the revolver in his coat pocket.

Then they reached the Bund, and Miller turned. "Come on, Winston!" he cried again breathlessly, and to gether they strode to the end of the long public wharf.

"What is it, you scoundrel? Give me my god!" shouted Winston amid the clatter of traffic and the chatter of cooly voices about them.

Miller's long arm shot upward, jerked back and then forward, and the jade god described a parabola in the air and splashed dully into the muddy waters of the Whangpo. As the circles widened and disappeared in the flowing current Miller turned to Winston and thrust out his hand.

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"Forgive me, Jack," he said in a tone broken with emotion. "I did it for both of us. It would have ruined us both in the end."

Winston's gaze had been riveted on the spot where the jade god had disappeared. Now he turned his eyes to Miller's, and there was a certain light of understanding in them. He smiled ruefully and took the proffered hand. "I believe—I believe I am very glad," he said.

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