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## The Death Stone of Musu

"The Tale Has Served Its Purpose"

By JESSIE L. SHARP

Overhead was the Japanese sky of tender blue. In the far distance the snowy peak of Fujiyama seemed painted against the horizon, and below at the foot of the terraced hill the waters of the inland sea lapped the silver sands.

It was all very beautiful, very peaceful, a place to dream of love or a happy past or a sweet, beckoning future.

Yet Harrington stood there with a grim smile on his lips and murder in his heart. In the doorway of a tiny hillside temple his form bulked large beside the small Japanese guide.

"You are sure?" he asked Taki for the third time that afternoon.

"Of a most positive sureness," responded Taki, also for the third time.

Harrington turned slowly and went back into the temple. Six strides carried him across to the shrine with its image of the sitting Buddha, calm, peaceful and remote in its attitude of meditation.

He did not look up at the image. His eyes sought the small flat gray green stone set in the exact center of the votive table. It was round and polished as if with much rubbing.

"If you have led to me, Taki," he said sternly to the guide, who had padded softly in his wake, "it will go hard with you. I am not to be taken in by ordinary tourist stories."

"That is a truth," assured Taki solemnly. "I have myself seen it with my own eyes."

"Seen what?"

"The action of the death stone, honorable sir."

Harrington suppressed a shudder, and his voice shook a little as he mentioned to the Japanese.

"Go on, Taki. Tell me about it."

Taki drew a long, hissing breath and sat down upon his heels. Harrington leaned against the votive table and gazed moodily down at the green stone.

"A man from my village had an enemy. He wished him much evil, and he persuaded his enemy to come to Musu and to kiss the death stone; said it would bring much virtue. The enemy kiss the stone and fall dead on the table."

Harrington walked slowly to the door and went down the crooked path among the cryptomerias. Presently he came out on the seashore and made his way toward the picturesque little inn where he had been stopping.

His host came forward, rubbing his hands with ill concealed pleasure.

"My lord will not dine alone tonight," he said, smiling. "Other American gentlemen and ladies will honor my worthless house."

Harrington smiled absently, and then as a sudden thought blazed its way through the dark chaos of his mind he asked abruptly:

"These new people—what are their names?"

"Alas, it has escaped my wretched memory," lamented Chenyo, "but one is a tall gentleman of reddish hair and merry laugh."

"Grayson himself. At last!" muttered Harrington, and he hurried away to his tiny room, where a servant was waiting with water for his bath.

When he emerged an hour later he was clothed in spotless white, and, cool, refreshed and handsome, he was warmly welcomed by the little party of Americans dining on the veranda.

"Dick Harrington, by all that's good!" shouted James Grayson, springing up and grasping Harrington's reluctant hand. "Priscilla, here is an old friend. You remember Priscilla, eh, Dick?" Grayson laughed heartily as his pretty wife arose and shook hands with the grave eyed man.

"Yes, I remember Mrs. Grayson," rumbled Harrington's deep voice, and the pretty color which had graced Priscilla's cheeks faded and left a startled pallor.

Priscilla Grayson had nearly loved Dick Harrington once upon a time. Then Grayson had come and swept her heart into his own keeping. She had never forgotten Harrington's white hot anger, his bitter despair and his denunciation of Grayson, who seemed quite unconscious of playing traitor to his friend.

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Harrington had waited his time. Some day, he told himself, there would come the opportunity to pay back Grayson for his treachery. A kindly fate must bring them together, and then—let Grayson look out for himself.

So Harrington had nursed his hatred and jealousy through a bitter year of restless wandering from one country to another, nowhere finding comfort or peace for his troubled heart. A few weeks ago, when he first came to Japan, he heard that the Graysons were in Tokyo. When Taki, his guide, had told him the story of the death stone of Musu it had entered Harrington's mind to lure Grayson here, and—well, the death stone would do the rest.

It was something of a shock for him to find that the Graysons had come to Musu without a lure of any sort save the beauty of its sloping hillside and the exquisite pictures of sea and land and sky at sunrise and sunset. James Grayson was a landscape painter, and Musu had drawn him to paint her loveliness.

Now, as they gathered around the table, Harrington, the two Graysons and a bride and groom from San Francisco, the Martins, there was little hint of the tragedy that lurked behind Harrington's pleasantness. Priscilla quite forgot her nervousness and laughed and jested with her old lover, never knowing that each light reference to the past was like a stab wound in his heart. His lips grew white, and there was a tense look about his mouth when they arose from the table.

An idle evening followed. They walked on the sands and stood speechless in the glory of the sunset. They saw the moon rise over the distant peak of Fujiyama, and they were dumb when the moon's rays fell on the sacred mountain and turned the crest to a lustrous pearl.

"What a wonderful country!" breathed Mrs. Martin. "It does not seem that anything—good or wicked could ever happen here."

Harrington drew a sharp breath and looked away. Priscilla Grayson may have heard him, for she looked at his stern profile, and she seemed to find something ominous in its set expression, for she suddenly complained of the cold and urged her husband to return to the inn. The Martins soon followed, and Harrington was left alone with his bitterness of spirit.

The moon swung high in the heavens when a step sounded on the sand beside him.

"By Jove, I'd like to paint this!" cried Grayson's cordial voice.

"Wait until you see the temple," remarked Harrington deliberately.

Grayson sprang up. "Let's go there now."

Harrington got upon his feet and slowly led the way along the crooked path under the black shadows of the cryptomerias. On reaching the temple Harrington pushed open the polished cedar door and held it wide for Grayson to follow him. It was dim and fragrant in there. A candle was burning low before the altar. Some incense sticks were glowing red on the votive table. When their eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness they perceived the mighty image of the Buddha in the recess.

Presently they moved as by one accord and crossed to the votive table. While Grayson's eyes sought the face of the Buddha, Harrington's burning gaze was fixed on the death stone set in the table. The vase of incense sticks stood near, and the red glow from the burning sticks shone down and revealed the dull gray green stone.

"I wish—I wish I could paint this just as it is. But it isn't in my line, as you say," breathed Grayson, bringing his eyes down to meet those of the other man.

Harrington smiled stiffly.

"If you want to stifle your desires, old man, all you have to do is to kiss the wishing stone there," he said aw-

wardly.

"Wait, here goes, Dick! I shall wish for the genius to paint the temple as it is. Looks as idiotic as kissing the blarney stone, eh?" Grayson laughed, bent swiftly and would have pressed his lips to the death stone had not Harrington's hand snatched him back.

"Don't!" he cried sharply, placing himself before the table. "You don't know what you are doing, Jim."

Grayson smiled queerly.

"I happen to be acquainted with the death stone of Musu," he said quietly.

There followed a long silence. There was no sound save Harrington's deep agonized breathing. The smoke of the burning incense swirled upward and was lost in the darkness above the table. The face of the Buddha looked down upon them from the lotus leaf throne.

"I did not know. I never suspected until tonight, Dick. I am sorry," said Jim Grayson at last, and his hand rested on the shoulder of the man who had lured him to death and then snatched him away at the fatal moment.

Harrington slowly lifted his head and looked at his successful rival. Grayson read in his eyes all the pain and suffering he had undergone during the past two years, and a great pity filled his heart.

"I don't blame you, Harrington. I would have done the same thing under the same circumstances," he muttered.

"Come down to the shore and tell me all about it."

Without a word they went away and sat down on the silver sands. They talked until the gray dawn paled the east, and Priscilla came to the veranda of the inn, wan and frightened, looking for her husband.

She saw Grayson and Dick Harrington standing shoulder to shoulder talking as only intimate friends may talk. She saw them part with a long pressure of hands and her husband's affectionate slap on the other's shoulder.

"Harrington has been called home to put his shoulder to the wheel of business," he explained to Priscilla, but she guessed that somehow Dick Harrington had recovered his manhood, and she was glad.

Taki, the guide, came running to them. "My lord, Harrington has gone away," he said anxiously. "Perhaps he was offended that I could not tell the straight truth."

"You did not tell Mr. Harrington that the death stone had been stolen years ago and that the stone in the temple is merely a bit of old jade placed there to deceive the unwary?"

"I meant to undeceive him, sir, of a sureness I did."

"Never mind, Taki; the tale has served its purpose. You will never know how or why, but a good man has found himself again. Mr. Harrington bade me give you this." He tossed a silver coin toward the Japanese and went inside, where Priscilla was waiting for him.

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