

The jade pendant essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Jade Pendant had gathered around it a number of myths, some of which were quite absurd, such as the one that it was worth half-a-million dollars, but the reality was astonishing enough to raise gasps of admiration and envy. The jewel, as big as the palm of a child's hand, consisted of a thick circular piece of intricately carved jade of the most brilliant and lucid green, surrounded by the innumerable diamonds arranged in floral designs. It was worn on a chain round the neck, but the sheer weight of the jewel, not to mention the extreme folly of risking loss or theft, had caused it to be little disturbed in its place in the bank vaults.

Mrs. Khoo had worn it only twice-once at a banquet given by the sultan-the jewel had been specially flown, under strict security, to the royal town where it made quite a stir, even at a function that glittered with fabulous jewels-and again, at the wedding of her nephew. Since then, it had lain safely in the bank vaults, for the myriad weddings and other functions that Mrs. Khoo had subsequently attended were considered too insignificant to justify the presence of this jewel, the like of which nobody had ever seen. But its absence on the broad perfumed bosom of Mrs.

Khoo was as likely to provoke comments as its presence: 'Ah, you're not wearing the Jade Pendant! That's a disappointment to me, for I had hoped to see it. I've heard so much about it. ' To make up for the loss of pleasure that would have been afforded by the sight of the Jade Pendant, Mrs. Khoo would talk about its history-how it had come down to her from her mother who had got it from her own mother, and if its origin was traced far enough, it could be ascertained that the first possessor was a concubine of a Vietnamese emperor of the seventeenth century.

Its continuing connections with royalty must be something predestined, for, confided Mrs. Khoo, her mother had once told her that the wife of a sultan who had seen it had actually wanted to buy it, no matter how great the cost; she had actually sent emissaries to begin the task of negotiation and purchase. It was an extremely difficult thing to do, but the persistent royal lady was at last turned down. The engrossing question had been: to whom would Mrs. Khoo leave the jewel when she died-her daughter-in-law or her daughter?

Mrs. Khoo had actually long settled the matter in favour of her daughter. There was nothing she would not do for Lian Kim, her favourite child. Moreover, she would not wait for her death to hand over the jewel-when Lian Kim got married, the gift would be made. The bride would wear the Jade Pendant at the wedding dinner, for every one of the guests to see. When Lian Kim was home for the holidays with her fiance, she had insisted insisted her mother on taking the jewel out of the bank for him to see.

He was an Art student whom she had met in London, and the wonder on his face and the long whistle of admiration and incredulity as he looked at the Jade Pendant that Lian Kim had laughingly placed on his artist's begrimed sweater, was a small but definite step towards the mollification of his future mother-in-law whose chagrin, when her daughter wrote to her of being engaged to a foreigner, was great indeed. How vexing, she had thought to herself and later said to her husband, although she would not have dared to say the same to her daughter. How vexing to have a daughter married to a foreigner, and a poor one at that.

But there was nothing to be done, once the young people of today made up their minds. Her vexation was increased that day by a very humiliating incident. She had just shown the jade Pendant to Lian Kim and Ron and was getting ready to put it back in its case of red velvet, when she heard Ah Soh sweeping outside the room. Upon impulse, she called Ah Soh into the room to view the jewel, thinking afterwards, in the generosity of her heart, that even a humbled widowed relative who made cakes and puddings for sale in the streets, could be given the pleasure of looking at the jewel.

Ah Soh was all gratitude. She left the broom outside, tiptoed in with a great show of respect and awe, and raised her hands in shrill wonderment even before the box was opened to reveal its treasure. She exclaimed, she praised, she was breathless with the effort of pleasing a rich relative who allowed her and her daughter to live in a room at the back of the great house, to eat the food left on the great table, to benefit by the sale of old clothes, beer-bottles and newspapers.

Unfortunately, Ah Soh's daughter, a simple-minded girl of Lian Kims's age, had ambled in then, looking for her mother, and on seeing the jewel had crowed with childish delight, and actually snatched it up and pranced round the room, shrilly parading it on her chest. The terror of her mother who had quickly glanced up to see the look of violent disgust and displeasure on the face of Mrs. Khoo, was itself terrifying to behold. She shrieked at the girl, snatched the jewel back, laid it reverently back in its case and began scolding her erring daughter as vehemently as she could.

The insulted pride of the lady whose countenance had taken on a look of extreme hauteur, was to be mollified by no less than a severe thrashing anger against her rich relative lending great strength to her thin scrawny arms. The girl, who looked no more than a child though she was over twenty, whimpered, and would have been thrashed sick had not Mrs. Khoo intervened by saying stiffly, ' That will do, Ah Soh. Do you want to kill the child? ' ' Better for her to be killed than to insult you in this way! ' sobbed Ah Soh. Mrs. Khoo who found the incident too disgusting to be mentioned to her husband or daughter, soon forgot it.

She spent the three weeks of her daughter's vacation at home in pleasing the young couple as much as she could. She got the servants to cook all kinds of delicacies, and Ah Soh, anxious to pacify her further, helped as much as she could, endlessly. Whenever she could spare the time from her mah-jong, Mrs. Khoo entertained them, not sparing any expense. Mr. Khoo who doted on his youngest daughter was even willing to take time off from his gambling and his race-horses to take the couple round and introduce them proudly to his wide circle of friends. Lian Kim and Ron were to be married by the end of the year.

A sad occasion for the mother, ha! ha! do you know why? ' Mr. Khoo would laugh heartily, his round florid face wreathed in smiles. ' Because the Jade Pendant will be made over from mother to daughter. Ah, these women and their jewel! But I tell you, that locket's worth at least-' he would then whisper conspiratorially into the ears of his friend, revelling in the look of amazement on the face of the listener. It would never have occurred to any of their

friends to ask Mr. and Mrs. Khoo whether they were thinking of selling the Jade Pendant-it would have been an insult too great to be borne.

Yet the possibility had occurred to Mrs. Khoo, and the realisation, after some time, that it would have to be sold brought a spasm of terror to the lady as she paced about in her room, thinking what a sad state of affair the family was in financially. The money and property that had come down to them from their parents and grandparents-almost all dissipated! Mr. Khoo and his gambling and his horses and entertaining, the expensive education of her two sons and her daughter abroad-they were forever writing home for more money.

The immediate worry was the expense of Lian Kim's wedding. It could not, must not, be on a scale less than the wedding of her elder brother two years ago, or the wedding of the nephew, for that would be a severe loss of family face. Mrs. Khoo made a quick calculation of the cost of the wedding dress and trousseau, specially ordered from the French house of fashion, the furnishings for the new flat in London to be rented by the couple after their marriage, the wedding dinner for at least five hundred people in the Imperial Hotel-where was she to get the money from?

She uttered little cries of agitation and wrung her hands in vexation, as she walked about in her room. She had on one occasion represented her difficulties to her husband, but he had only laughed, pinched her cheek and said, ' Now, now, you are always worrying. We are okay, okay, and youi can go and get whatever you like, old girl. ' She had not dared to speak of her

difficulties to Lian Kim-she could not bear to spoil the happiness of her beloved child.

Once she was tempted to approach Ah Soh to borrow some money-she had heard whispers of the immense sum of money that Ah Soh had slowly accumulated over forty years, money she had saved from her sale of cakes and puddings, and from extreme frugality: Ah Soh made her own cigarettes by rolling the tobacco salvaged from thrown away cigarette ends, in little square pieces of paper, and her simple -minded daughter wore only the cast-off clothes of Lian Kim and other relatives. But she had quickly rejected the idea.

What, degrade herself by seeking help from a relative who was no better than a servant? Mrs. Khoo's inherent dislike of Ah Soh was increased by her suspicion that behind all that effusive humility and deference was a shrewdness and alertness that saw everything that was going on, and she even fancied that the little frightened-looking eyes in the thin pallid face sometimes laughed at her. After Lian Kim's wedding, I shall no longer tolerate her in the house, thought Mrs. Khoo resentfully.

She and that imbecile daughter she dotes on so much can pack up and leave. The thought of the wedding, which should have given so much pleasure to her fond mother's distressed heart her, for again and again she wondered where the money was to come from. Their two houses were already mortgaged; the shares would fetch but little. No matter how hard she tried to avoid it, the conclusion she inevitably reached was: the Jade

Pendant had to go. The impact of so awesome a decision caused Mrs. Khoo to have a violent headache.

The only consolation she could find in so dismal a situation was the thought that nobody need know that the Jade Pendant had been sold, as she could always give some explanation or other for it not being worn at the wedding, whereas if the wedding celebration were to be scaled down, how dreadful a loss of face that would be! She then went into urgent and secret family consultation in which her husband finally assented to the sale, stressing that they should get as good a price for such a jewel as they possibly could.

It was not so easy to win her daughter round-Lian Kim fritted excessively about the loss of something she had been promised, and it was only after a great deal of sulking that she would consent to the sale. The prospect of a modest wedding celebration as even more appalling than that of having to do without the Jade Pendant, and of the numerous excuses thought up to account for its absence, she at last settled on this one: that the large old-fashioned jewel would not go nicely with her Dior gown. The secrecy with which the sale of the Jade Pendant was to be affected became a matter of first importance.

Following the very discreet inquiries about potential buyers, an offer came and with conditions that could not but please Mrs. Khoo-the interested party was a very wealthy lady who made her home in another country, she wanted absolute secrecy in the entire proceeding, she would send the round a third person to collect the item. Her offer moreover was generous. Insist on cash, said Mr. Khoo. You never know about theses so-called rich foreigners. Cash it

was, and the Jade Pendant left its place in the bank vaults forever. With the matter settled, Mrs.

Khoo was happy again, and bustled about with the wedding preparations. ' My daughter has decided not to wear the Jade Pendant,' she told her friends. ' Oh these young people nowadays, they do not appreciate the beautiful things left them by their ancestors, and they are so intolerant of our old ways! ' Mrs. Khoo, caught up happily in the whirl of invitations and other preparations, did not, however, forget to tell Ah Soh, but in a kindly voice, ' There will be so many guests all dressed grandly and with their jewels, that it is better for you to dress well too.

I hope you have bought new clothes for the occasion? ' Ah Soh humbly and gratefully assured her that she had. The wedding dinner and celebration was on a scale as to merit talk for at least the next three days. At least Minister and three Members of Parliament, together with numerous business tycoons were present. Mrs. Khoo moved briskly among the guests, and even in the flutters of maternal anxiety and happiness, had the time to hope that Ah Soh's simple-minded daughter would not do anything to mar the splendour of the occasion.

She has wanted, tactfully, to tell Ah Soh not to bring her along, but had decided to be generous and charitable for such an occasion as this-the wedding of her youngest and favourite child. Her gaze swept briefly over the heads in that large resplendent, chandeliered room, and rested on a spot in the far corner, where she could easily pick out Ah Soh, decently dressed for once, sitting with her daughter and some relatives. Mrs. Khoo wondered why

the gaze, not only of those at that imbecile child-people were positively staring at her, and not only staring, but whispering loudly, urgently, among themselves.

The whispering and the staring spread outwards in widening ripples of mounting excitement and tension. Mrs. Khoo made her way towards this focus of tremulous attention, and she too stared -not at the idiot child-like face but at the jewel that rested awkwardly on the flat, child-like chest. The Jade Pendant! The idiot girl crowed with pleasure, and her mother, who sat very near her holding her hand affectionately, was nodding to the faces crowding in upon them, the frightened look gone forever from her eyes.