

Kiyoshi and the Great Pearl

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In small village by the sea lived a man named Kiyoshi. The village was poor and Kiyoshi barely was able to provide for his wife and infant son as a pearl diver. Every morning, Kiyoshi would paddle out his boat into the sea, which had belonged to his father and his father before him, and would dive down into the water and gather the oysters he could find on the ocean floor. Then while sitting in his canoe he would open the oysters and check the contents. Usually he would find some small, grey seed pearls that he would trade to stave off starvation. But like the other pearl divers in the village he always hoped that one day he would find the Great Pearl, one that was so large and so perfect that his family could live in comfort and security all of their days.

One summer, Kiyoshi rose early as he usually did. The day was warm, the sun was high and the sea was calm and translucent as he took his boat out to deeper waters. He knew it was too much to hope that today that he could find the Great Pearl that could cure all their troubles, but perhaps...

On the ocean floor, Kiyoshi gathered oysters. He dove deeper and beneath the overhang of a rock he found a particularly big oyster. He grabbed it, shoved it in his basket and swam back up to the surface.

Kiyoshi sat in his boat opening the oysters, checking the inside for pearls and discarding the flesh in the ocean. He left the large oyster for last, and when he was done with the rest he took it into his hands.

It was larger than he realised, almost as big as his hand. The rock overhang had no doubt sheltered it and prevented from being discovered. Carefully, he slid his knife along the join and opened it.

He gave a shout. Inside was the largest pearl he had ever seen. Perfect, pure and as opalescent as the moon itself. He held it in his hand, the pearl was the size of a chicken's egg.

Kiyoshi felt excited and shouted again. He had found the Great Pearl and would be able to provide for his family's comfort. He hastened to the shore.

Kiyoshi's shouts had attracted the attention of the other pearl divers who followed him in with others from the village running up to meet Kiyoshi's boat. When Kiyoshi arrived there was quite a crowd around him, asking him if he had found the Great Pearl and if they could see it or hold it. Kiyoshi didn't talk to any of them, pushing past them to get to his own house, laughing and grinning. When he came through his door his wife ran to meet him.

"Fortune has smiled upon both of us this day," he said, and then he showed his wife the Great Pearl.

Some of the villagers clustered around him, wanting to see the Great Pearl, but Kiyoshi refused to talk to anyone, going into the house with his wife.

Once inside, Kiyoshi sat down with their son while she prepared their evening meal. His mind was racing. Tomorrow he would go and see the pearl traders in the next village. There he would sell the Great Pearl and he would be wealthy. His son could go to school, get shoes and fine clothes... They could *all* get shoes and fine clothes! Perhaps even a house in the town with servants so that his wife did not have to work. Kiyoshi closed his hand around the Great Pearl. It was his, and no one would take it from him or the wealth that it would bring him. His son fell asleep in his arms unnoticed.

"The meal is ready, husband," said his wife. "Put the pearl away."

She took their son and put him to bed. Kiyoshi began to eat, tucking the Great Pearl away in his belt. But all his thoughts were on it and what it would bring once he sold it.

After dinner, Kiyoshi's wife called him to come to bed, but Kiyoshi had to do something first. He pulled back their sleeping mat and dug a small hole in the dirt underneath. He put the Great Pearl in the hole, smoothed some dirt over it to hide it and covered it with his sleeping mat. Then he went to bed.

But he couldn't sleep, lay wide awake clutching his knife, listening to the sounds of the night and convinced that everyone was someone after the Great Pearl. Several times he put his hand beneath his sleeping mat to make sure the Great Pearl was still there.

And then he heard it. Footsteps outside his hut, and getting closer. An intruder, after the Great Pearl.

Kiyoshi ran to the door and squatted down next to it holding his knife, waiting for someone to enter. He heard the door to his house pulled aside and then he struck, launching himself onto the intruder and brandishing his knife. The intruder fled, making for a thicket of trees, Kiyoshi followed the intruder, waving

his knife and screaming.

This caused quite a stir in the village and people came to see the what the noise was, but many were disturbed at the sight of Kiyoshi.

"He tried to take the Great Pearl!" Kiyoshi shouted. "I will do the same to anyone who tries!" He then went back into the house.

Once instead, Kiyoshi paced furiously, still holding the knife. His wife was most distressed at this behaviour. "Husband, I have never seen you like this," she said. "This...this pearl has changed you. I wish you had never found it."

Kiyoshi turned to face his wife. "How can you say that, my wife, when the Great Pearl will make our lives so much better!"

"Give it up husband!" she pleaded. "We were happy before, this pearl has brought nothing but evil!"

At this, Kiyoshi lunged at his wife in anger, throwing her to the ground violently. The knife he carried scratched her arm, drawing blood. Immediately he reacted with horror with what he had done, dropping the knife and helping to her feet.

"I am sorry wife," he said, "but you must see...once I sell the Great Pearl many good things will happen. We will have enough to eat, have new clothes and shoes, and our son may even go to school."

His wife considered this. "And you will sell the pearl tomorrow?"

"I will," said Kiyoshi promised.

The next day they all travelled to the next village, Kiyoshi going in the lead, followed by his wife carrying their son. And with them were people from their village, wanting to see how much Kiyoshi would get for the pearl.

They entered the village en mass, the inhabitants staring as the crowd entered and proceeded to go where the pearl dealers practiced their trade. They sat outside their houses, richly dressed in finely coloured silks. Before each of them was a table and upon the table was a cushion covered in fine velvet which they examined the pearls that they might buy.

Kiyoshi strode up to the pearl dealers proudly, removing the Great Pearl from inside his belt and placing it on the cushion in front of the dealer he felt was the most prosperous. The pearl dealer examined the pearl, moving it with his many-ringed fingers to see it in different lights. But his manner seemed rather casual, distracted, as if the pearl did not particularly interest him. This seemed odd to Kiyoshi, as he thought the pearl dealers would be pleased to see pearls as large as his Great Pearl.

After what seemed the longest time, the pearl dealer looked up. "A pearl of this size is most...difficult to sell," he said slowly. "The quality is also...lacking somewhat, the colour...the surface is a bit rough..." He shook his head.

"How much will you give me for it?" Kiyoshi demanded.

The pearl dealer told him an amount.

Kiyoshi stared at the man. "It is worth ten times that!"

"That is what I will pay for it," said the pearl dealer smoothly. "Nothing more."

"Then we will try elsewhere," said Kiyoshi, taking the pearl back.

But Kiyoshi found that all the pearl dealers gave him a price that was very low, and despite Kiyoshi's protests, would not go higher. Dejected, he started to leave the village, the crowd around them had long gone.

"You should have sold the pearl to the first man," Kiyoshi's wife said. "That money would have bought enough food to last the winter."

"It wasn't a fair price!" Kiyoshi protested.

"But it would have helped," said his wife.

Kiyoshi turned to her in anger. "Think woman! Once I sell the Great Pearl for what is worth, we need not worry about going hungry again."

"But who will buy it from you?" his wife asked.

Kiyoshi considered this. "I must go to the city," he decided. "The pearl dealers here, they are all thieves among each other, in the city I will get a fair price for the Great Pearl."

"I hope so, husband," his wife said. "For this pearl has been nothing but a curse on our family since you found it, and I want you to be rid of it."

Kiyoshi ignored her as they walked towards home.

It was dark as they approached their village, the moon was but a slender crescent and provided little light.

The path to their village was narrow, trees on one side, the other a cliff over the sea.

Had Kiyoshi been paying more attention, he might have heard some movement in the trees. So he was completely surprised when bandits jumped out in front of them.

One had a crossbow, the two others swords. They formed a line, blocking the path.

"Hand over the pearl and we will let you pass!" said the one with the crossbow.

"Never!" screamed Kiyoshi. He drew his knife and ran at them.

The one with the crossbow managed to get out a shot before Kiyoshi charged at him, the force of the impact causing him to fall off the cliff. The second and third sprang at Kiyoshi, one holding a sword at his throat, the other grabbing at Kiyoshi trying to find the pearl.

"Fiends! You will never have it!" Kiyoshi shouted as he struggled.

And then he heard a scream, it had come from his wife. This was enough distraction for the two bandits to pin Kiyoshi to the ground to try and take the pearl.

But Kiyoshi's wife continued to scream and scream. The bundle in which she held their son was stained with blood, a crossbow bolt embedded in it. Kiyoshi's blood ran cold.

"You fools, you stupid men!" the woman sobbed, cuddling the body of child.

It was at this moment that one of the bandits seized the pearl from Kiyoshi. He saw it in the hands of the bandit, his Great Pearl which had promised so much, worthless to him now that his son was dead.

"You can have it!" Kiyoshi said. "May it bring you the fortune it did me!"

He took his family home.

That is the end of Kiyoshi's story, but not the end of the Great Pearl's. The Great Pearl then found it's way back to pearl dealer who had paid the bandits. That night, as he lay in bed, the pearl dealer had his throat slit by that same bandit who took the pearl north on a ship. And when the ship sank in a storm, the Great Pearl went to the bottom of the sea where it remains to this day.