

Passage 1 – Pearls

- 1 Pearls are produced within the soft tissue of oysters in the sea. After an irritating microscopic object – wrongly thought by some to be a grain of sand – has got under its shell, the oyster produces a substance to seal off the irritation, which results in coating after coating of nacre, or mother-of-pearl, which is strong, resilient and shiny. There is evidence that the Chinese carried out extensive fishing of pearls, which are the most beautiful of gems, in the South China Sea 2000 years ago. 5
- 2 For centuries, fine quality pearls have been seen as exquisite objects and, because of their perceived beauty, they were used in many societies to make jewellery, where a pearl was set as a centrepiece in rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces. Art from around the world, particularly from Europe, shows that pearls were used to adorn clothing for both men and women. Pearl fishing brought deserved wealth to those who engaged in it, such as the people of the Pandyan Dynasty in India, who controlled pearl fishing along the South Indian coast for several centuries. 10
- 3 Pearls feature in several religions, further emphasising their importance. In the Christian Bible, holy things are compared to pearls, and in the Qur'an good deeds are associated with the wearing of pearls. Some Indian mythology describes how powdered pearls can be used for medicinal purposes such as, for example, an aid to good digestion or a cure for mental illnesses. 15
- 4 Before the twentieth century, the only way of obtaining pearls was for a diver to gather oysters from the sea, and then open them to see if they contained pearls. This was a very difficult process as hundreds of oysters were needed to obtain perhaps only three or four pearls; this is the reason why pearls fetched such extraordinary prices in the past. In order to find enough oysters, divers were often forced to descend to great depths, sometimes to over 30 metres, on a single breath; this meant that, in order to survive, they had to grease their bodies to conserve heat and close their nostrils with clips. Divers faced the danger of being attacked by hostile creatures – off some South American coasts, for example, pearl fishing took place in shark-infested waters. Many divers lost consciousness and drowned because they held their breath for too long underwater. 20
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- 5 In modern times, the vast majority of pearls produced worldwide are cultured pearls, which are formed when natural processes are aided by human intervention. Oysters are kept in farms with the intention of obtaining pearls from them. The system which produces cultured pearls imitates nature; a bead is deliberately introduced as an irritant under each oyster's shell. It responds by coating the irritant in nacre, and a pearl is formed. The introduction of cultured pearls hit the pearl fishing industry hard, with some critics claiming that cultured pearls were not authentic. Nevertheless, cultured pearl farming took off, mainly in Japan, because high quality pearls can be produced with no risk to human life. Moreover, they can be produced much more quickly than natural pearls, in fact in as little as six months. Since every oyster produces a pearl, there is no unnecessary killing of hundreds of oysters. This is good news for conservation groups who argue that such killing is cruel. 30
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- 6 The advances in the production of cultured pearls mean that coloured pearls can be produced by inserting a natural dye under an oyster's shell; for example, cobalt chloride ensures a pink pearl. Purists would argue that cultured pearls can often be distinguished from natural pearls through the use of x-rays, but most people appreciate the fact that most of the chance and guesswork has been taken out of pearl production. This enables the industry to be a stable form of employment to very many people. 40
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- 7 Cultured pearls are produced more efficiently and in greater numbers, and so they are very much cheaper in price than naturally produced ones. This means that owning and wearing pearls is no longer limited to the rich.

Passage 2 – Mr Lutchman takes some photographs

In this passage, Mr Lutchman's traditional camera needs a roll of film inside it to take photographs. This roll of film has to be sent away and developed into photographs.

- 1 Mr Lutchman's interest in photography came about suddenly. Wilkie, a friend at the office, had mentioned casually that he had a camera which he would like to sell. An idea caught Mr Lutchman's fancy, and soon became a temptation. 'Look at that sunset,' he exclaimed enthusiastically to his wife one evening, after the idea had floated alluringly in his mind for a few days. 'Wouldn't it be really nice to take a photograph of it?' 5
- 2 Mrs Lutchman was taken aback by the strangeness of this question. She glanced briefly at the sky and at her husband. 'You need to have a camera before you do a thing like that. Photographs don't just drop down out of the sky,' she said. 'Don't do anything foolish.'
- 3 The following morning, Mr Lutchman offered twenty dollars for the camera. Wilkie laughed loudly, telling him the camera was an excellent one with flash bulbs and light meters. 'Twenty dollars!' he exclaimed. 'I must remember to tell the boys that one.' The 'boys' played a large and mysterious role in Wilkie's life. He referred constantly to them. Mr Lutchman regretted having asked him about the camera. He was afraid of what the 'boys' would say when they heard of his offer, but it was too late now to turn back. 'The price is a hundred dollars,' said Wilkie. 'That camera cost me two hundred dollars and is in perfect condition.' Against his better judgement, Mr Lutchman bought the camera. 10
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- 4 That evening, Mr Lutchman turned the camera delicately in his hands and, glancing at the instruction booklet, decided it contained only incomprehensible words and baffling drawings. The next day he bought a large and impressively illustrated book on photography. In particular, one photograph of a sunset delighted him and he cut it out and plastered it onto the sitting room wall, followed soon by others, all equally dramatic, of skies being ripped apart by flurries of lightning and fields of flowers bending before the wind. 20
- 5 At last Mr Lutchman felt ready to tackle what he described as a 'subject'. He bought his first roll of film and drove out into the countryside. He sent his roll of film away to be developed, and awaited the return of his photographs with mounting excitement. Eventually a little packet arrived, which Mr Lutchman ripped open. 'The first one hasn't come out properly,' he murmured. When his wife came in an hour later, Mr Lutchman was sitting at the table, his head buried in his hands and his spoiled photographs scattered around him. 'Nobody is perfect right away,' Mrs Lutchman said consolingly. Mr Lutchman moaned softly, moving his head from side to side in the palms of his hands. Mrs Lutchman warmed to her theme. 'Maybe it was the fault of the people who developed them. I would suggest you develop your own photographs.' 25
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- 6 With the next roll of film, Mr Lutchman was less ambitious, confining himself to photographs of his children on the pavement in front of the house. A group of curious neighbours had gathered to watch as Mr Lutchman arranged the children in a line. Strained expressions settled on their faces. 'Grin! Grin!' he howled at them. Mr Lutchman was beginning to lose his temper. The strained expressions continued. 35
- 7 When the roll of film was finished, it was time to develop the photographs with the equipment Mr Lutchman had now bought. Explaining that photographs needed darkness to be developed properly, Mr Lutchman took the roll of film to a bedroom, where he pulled shut the curtains. 'It's not dark enough,' he told his wife disconsolately. Mrs Lutchman suggested developing the photographs under the bed. She brought in the developing equipment and several saucers and basins of water as instructed. Mr Lutchman could feel his confidence ebbing away from him as he crawled under the bed. Mrs Lutchman handed him the items one by one, finally draping a blanket over his head. She sprawled on the floor and peeped at 40
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the huddled mass. Then she heard the first splash. The basins clanged against each other, followed by a steady muffled roar of anger and distress. Water began flowing across the floor. Mrs Lutchman pulled the blanket away to reveal the drenched body of her husband. After this episode Mr Lutchman neglected his camera. He did make one or two passing references to it, but only when something else had gone wrong and he was feeling depressed.

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