

A String of Blue Beads¹⁾

Pete Richard was the loneliest man in town on the day Jean Grace opened the door of his shop. It's a small shop which had come down to him from his grandfather. The little front window was strewn with a disarray²⁾ of old—fashioned things: bracelets and locket worn in days before the Civil War, gold rings and silver boxes, images of jade and ivory³⁾, porcelain figurines. On this winter's afternoon a child was standing there, her forehead against the glass, earnest and enormous eyes studying each treasure as if she were looking for something quite special. Finally she straightened up with a satisfied air and entered the store.

The shadowy interior of Pete Richard's establishment was even more cluttered than his show window. Shelves were stacked with jewel caskets, dueling pistols, clocks and lamps, and the floor was heaped⁴⁾ with irons, mandolins⁵⁾ and things hard to find a name for. Behind the counter stood Pete himself, a man not more than thirty but with hair already turning gray. There was a bleak air about him as he looked at the small customer who flattened her ungloved hands on the counter.

"Mister, "she began, "would you please let me look at the string of blue beads in the window?" Pete parted the draperies⁶⁾ and lifted out a necklace. The turquoise stones gleamed brightly against the pallor of his palm as he spread the ornament before her. "They're just perfect, "said the child, entirely to herself. "Will you wrap them up pretty for me, please?"

Pete studied her with a stony air. "Are you buying these for someone?" "They're for my big sister. She takes care of me. You see, this will be the first Christmas since Mother died. I've been looking for the most wonderful Christmas present for my sister.

"How much money do you have?" asked Pete warily. She had been busily untying the knots in a handkerchief and now she poured out a handful of pennies on the counter. "I emptied my bank. " she explained simply.

Pete looked at her thoughtfully. Then he carefully drew back the necklace. The price tag was visible to him but not to her. How could he tell her? The trusting look of her blue eyes smote him like the pain of an old wound. "Just a minute, "he said, and turned toward the back of the store. Over his shoulder he called, "What's your name?" He was very busy about something. "Jean Grace. "

When Pete returned to where Jean Grace waited, a package lay in his hand, wrapped in scarlet paper and tied with a bow of green. "There you are, "he said shortly. "Don't lose it on the way home. "

She smiled happily over her shoulder as she ran out the door. Through the window he watched her go, while desolation flooded his thoughts. Something about Jean Grace and her string of beads had stirred him to the depths of a grief that would not stay buried. The child's hair was wheat yellow, her eyes sea blue, and once upon a time, not long before, Pete had been in love with a girl with hair of that same yellow and with eyes just as blue. And the turquoise necklace was to have been hers.

But there had come a rainy night— a truck skidding on a slippery road— and the life was crushed out of his dream. Since then, Pete had lived too much with his grief in

solitude. He was politely attentive to customers, but after hours his world seemed irrevocably empty. He was trying to forget in a self-pitying haze that deepened day by day. The blue eyes of Jean Grace jolted⁷⁾ him into acute remembrance of what he had lost. The pain of it made him recoil from the exuberance of holiday shoppers. During the next ten days trade was brisk; chattering women swarmed in, fingering trinkets, trying to bargain. When the last customer had gone, late on Christmas Eve, he sighed with relief. It was over for another year. But for Pete the night was not quite over.

The door opened and a young woman hurried in. With an inexplicable⁸⁾ start, he realized that she looked familiar, yet he could not remember when or where he had seen her before. Her hair was golden yellow and her large eyes were blue. Without speaking, she drew from her purse a package loosely unwrapped in its red paper, a bow of green ribbon with it. Presently the string of blue beads lay gleaming again before him.

“Did this come from your shop?” she asked.

Pete raised his eyes to hers and answered softly, “Yes, it did.”

“Are the stones real?”

“Yes. Not the finest quality — but real.”

Can you remember who it was you sold them to?”

She was a small girl. Her name was Jean. She bought them for her older sister's Christmas present. “How much are they worth?”

The price, he told her solemnly, “is always a confidential matter between the seller and the customer.”

But Jean has never had more than a few pennies of spending money. How could she pay for them?”

She paid the biggest price anyone can ever pay, he said. “She gave all she had. There was a silence then that filled the little curio shop. He saw the faraway steeple, a bell began ringing. The sound of the distant chiming, the little package lying on the counter, the question in the eyes of the girl, and the strange feeling of renewal struggling unreasonably in the heart of Pete, all had come to be because of the love of a child.

“But why did you do it?”

He held out the gift in his hand.

“It's already Christmas morning, he said. “And it's my misfortune that I have no one to give anything to. Will you let me see you home and wish you a Merry Christmas at your door?”

And so, to the sound of many bells and in the midst of happy people, Pete Richard and a girl whose name he had yet to hear, walked out into the beginning of the great day that brings hope into the world for us all.

□by Fulton Oursler

蓝宝石项链

在珍·格雷斯开门进他店里的那一天，皮特·理查德是镇上最孤独的人。他的店很小，是祖父传给他的。店子的小橱窗里杂乱无章地摆满了各种古玩：内战前人们戴的手镯、挂在项链上的小盒、金戒指、银盒子、玉石和象牙制品、小瓷像等。在这个冬天的下午，一个孩

子站在那儿，额头贴在橱窗玻璃上，急切的大眼睛审视着每一件宝物，似乎在寻找一样很特别的东西。最后她带着满意的神情挺直了身子，走进店里。

皮特·理查德店内很阴暗，且比橱窗更凌乱不堪。架子上塞满了首饰盒、决斗手枪、钟和灯；地上堆满了熨斗、曼陀林和一些叫不出名字的东西。皮特就站在柜台后面，他年纪不到30，而头发却已花白。当他看着这个小顾客把没戴手套的双手放在柜台上时，皮特的神情有些黯然。

“先生，她开口问道：“你能让我看看你橱窗里的那串蓝宝石吗？”皮特拉开帷帐，把项链拿了出来，摊在自己的手掌上给她看。蓝绿色的宝石在他苍白的手掌中熠熠发光。“它们太棒了，”小女孩说，完全是自言自语。“能麻烦你把它们给我包装得漂亮点吗？”

皮特面无表情地注视着她。“你想给谁买这些宝石？”“是给我大姐姐。她照顾我。你瞧，这是我妈妈去世后的第一个圣诞节。我一直在给我姐姐找一份最好的圣诞礼物。”

“你有多少钱？”皮特小心翼翼地问。她急忙把手帕上的结解开，将一把便士倒在柜台上。“我把所有的钱都拿出来了。”她简单地解释说。

皮特若有所思地看着她。然后他把项链抽了回来。价格标签对着他而不是对着小姑娘。他怎么能对她说呢？她那双蓝色的眼睛里的信任的目光仿佛触动了一个隐隐作痛的老伤口。“稍等一下，”他说着话，转身朝储藏室后面走去。“你叫什么名字？”皮特边匆匆地干着什么，边回头问道。“珍·格雷丝。”

当皮特回到珍等候着的柜台前时，他手里拿着一个小盒子，是用鲜红的纸包起来的，上面还系着一根打成蝴蝶结的绿丝带。“给你，”他简短地说。“别在回家的路上弄丢了。”

她欢快地笑着，冲出店子。皮特从橱窗中目送她离去，心中一片悲凉。珍·格雷丝身上的某些东西和她的那串珠子搅动了她心中无法掩藏的深深的悲伤。那女孩的头发是小麦般的淡黄色，眼睛是海一样的蓝。皮特曾一度爱上一个有着和这女孩一样的黄色头发和蓝色眼睛的姑娘。而那蓝宝石的项链本该属于她。

然而在一个雨夜——一辆卡车在路上打滑了——那女孩的生命就从他的梦中被夺走了。从那以后，皮特形影相吊，万分悲痛。他对顾客周到而有礼貌，但是打烊以后，他的世界就总是显得一片空白。他在一天浓似一天的自哀自怜的迷雾中努力忘却痛苦。珍·格雷丝的蓝眼睛让他猛然而痛切地想起了他之所失。这痛苦使他在节日里兴高采烈的顾客面前显得有些畏缩。随后10天里生意很红火。叽叽喳喳的女士们蜂拥而来，拨弄着各种饰物，讨价还价。圣诞节前夕的深夜，当最后一名顾客离去后，皮特舒了一口气。又一年过去了，但对皮特来说，这一夜还没结束。

门开了，一位年轻的女子匆匆而入。不知为什么，皮特一震，因为他觉得她很面熟，却记不起他在何时何地见过她。她有着金黄的头发和蓝色的眼睛。一言不发地，她从手提包里抽出一个松散地用红纸包的小盒子，上面还有一个用绿丝带系的蝴蝶结。那串蓝宝石珠立刻又在他的面前熠熠发光。

“这是从你店里买的吗？”她问道。

皮特抬起头看着她，轻轻地回答说：“是，是从我这儿买的。”

“这宝石是真的吗？”“是真的。这宝石虽不是最好的——但是真的。”“你还记得你卖给谁了吗？”

“卖给了一个小姑娘。她的名字叫珍。她是买给她姐姐作圣诞礼物的。”

“这宝石值多少钱？”“至于价钱，”皮特严肃地告诉她：“一直是商家和顾客之间的秘密。”

“但珍从来都只有几便士的零花钱。她怎么买得起这宝石呢？”

“她给的是所有人能给的最高价，”皮特说。“她把她所有的钱都拿出来了。”

接着这个小古董店变得一片寂静。他看见远处的教堂尖塔，钟开始鸣响。远处的钟声，柜台上的小盒，姑娘眼中的疑问，皮特心中奇怪的生命复苏感——这一切都是因为一个孩子

的爱。

“可你为什么要这么做？”

皮特把礼物递给她。“已经是圣诞节的早晨了，”他说：“我不幸无人可送什么东西。你能让我送你回家，在你家门口说一声祝你圣诞快乐吗？”

于是，在许多钟鸣响之时，在幸福的人群中，皮特·里查德和一位尚不知姓名的姑娘跨入了那给世上每一个人带来希望的伟大的一天的开端。

NOTE 注释：

1. bead [bi:d] n. 有孔的小珠
2. disarray [disə'rei] n. 混乱；没有秩序
3. ivory ['aivəri] n. 象牙
4. heap [hi:p] v. 堆积
5. mandolin ['mændəlɪn] n. [音]曼陀林
6. drapery ['dreipəri] n. (供装饰用的)织物，帷帐，布料
7. jolt [dʒəʊlt] v. 摇晃
8. inexplicable [in'eksplɪkəbl] adj. 无法说明的
9. renewal [ri'nju(:)əl] n. 复苏，复兴，恢复