

The Chinese Statue

1.

Why is Sir Alexander Heathcote referred to as an exact man? Give six precise points from the text to support your answer. Describe, in brief, his encounter with the Chinese artisan in Ha Li Chuan. In what way did it burden Sir Alexander Heathcote?

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Sir Alexander Heathcote is exact six foot three ~~is~~ and a quarter inches tall. He rose at seven every morning and joined his wife for breakfast. He had on boiled egg cooked precisely for four minutes with two pieces of toast with one spoonful of Cooper's marmalade and drank a cup of China tea.

He would leave his residence at exactly eight twenty and arrive at the foreign office promptly at eight fifty nine, returning home again at the stroke of six. He had more than an amateur interest in the art of Ming Dynasty.

During his career he was posted as a minister in Peking where he was given an opportunity to observe Ming art in its natural habitat. Being an exact man, he wrote in his will specific instructions as to the disposal of his estate, including what ~~was~~ was to happen to the statue after his death. He bequeathed it to his first son, requesting that he do the same.

Sir Alexander liked to travel into the outlying districts of Peking. On one such journey, he was passing through the muddy streets of a small village called Ha Li Chuan, some fifty miles from Peking. He finds an old craftsman's working place. Entering the ramshackle wooden workshop he admires the delicate pieces of ivory ~~jade~~ and jade that ~~is~~ crammed the shelves from floor to ceiling.

The craftsman bustled forward in a long, blue coolie robe and flat back hat to greet him. A jet black plaited pigtail fell down his back. The minister studied many pieces with admiration and praised the craftsman's skill. They both shared a love for Ming art and the minister impressed the old craftsman with his knowledge in the subject. The craftsman thus gifted the minister a statue that had been in his family for over seven generations. The minister was mesmerised by the statue and expressed the desire to own it. The craftsman lets him have it as a gift.

According to an old Chinese custom, when a stranger has been generous, one must return the kindness within the calendar year.

2. i) Write on the Chinese traditions and customs referred to in the story - How are they central to the plot of the story? [8]
- ii) What is referred to as the 'property of a gentleman' by the Sotheby's? Narrate briefly the circumstances under which the property arrives at the auction house. [7]

→ One never invites an honoured guest into his humble home until they have known each other for many years. This is why the Minister remained outside in the workshop while the craftsman went to get the statue.

According to an old Chinese tradition, if an honoured guest requests something the giver will grow in the eyes of his fellow men by parting with it.

A Chinese custom states that if a stranger has been generous, one must return the kindness within the same financial calendar year.

These traditions and customs are important to the story because they build the story, highlight the relationship

between Sir Alexander and the craftsman. They also bring out the character of the minister.

'The property of a gentleman' referred to a statue that was up for auction at Sotheby's.

This statue was gifted to Sir Alexander Heathcote when he was posted in Peking during his diplomatic service. It was then passed down to his eldest son, Major James Heathcote who was, at the time, serving his Queen in the Boer War. Upon his death, it came into the possession of his son, Reverend Alexander Heathcote who was presiding over a small flock at the parish of Much Hadham in Hertfordshire. ~~The~~ His son, Captain James Heathcote, was the next owner of the statue. After he was killed on the beaches of Dunkirk, the statue came to the captain two-year-old son, Alex Heathcote. He was, according to his grandmother, a selfish, spoiled little brat. When he was sinking under a lot of debt, he decided to put the statue up for auction in order to settle them with the money he gets. This is how that statue found its way to the auction house.