



White Jade Tiger

By Julie Lawson

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Editorial Review

Review

"Lawson successfully combines a very real sense of period, a vivid portrait of the lives of the Chinese workers who built the railway, and an exciting adventure."

About the Author

Julie Lawson has written more than 20 young adult titles. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

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CHAPTER ONE

Jasmine, run! Cords of panic tightened around her chest. Her heart raced with fear.

Run! Don't look back! The warning came too late. Piercing yellow lights sprang out of the blackness. A white shape leaped towards her. She tried to scream but the sound strangled in her throat. Then, total darkness. Pressure. Rising terror. As if she were buried alive.

Run! She struggled to break the paralyzing hold gripping her body. If only she could move, if...

"Aieeee!" The scream jolted her awake. For a moment, she didn't know where she was or even who she was. And who had screamed? Surely that hadn't been *her* voice.

For a long time she lay awake, trying to make sense of the recurring nightmare. The voice was becoming clearer. Someone was reaching out to her, and getting closer all the time.

"Two for me, one for the bowl." Jasmine Steele knelt on the damp ground, happily picking her first crop of straw berries. The strawberries had been her project right from the start. "You won't have to do anything," she promised, knowing how her parents hated gardening. "I'll do everything myself." And she had, from buying the plants to keeping out the deer. All her digging, planting, weeding and watering had resulted in perfect strawberries, plump, juicy and sweet. Perfect tens, she thought, treating herself to another one. Just like today.

So what if she'd had the nightmare again. By morning there was never anything left of it, nothing she could remember. And so what if it was raining. The rain brought out the smells of summer-wild roses, freshly-cut grass, and the best-ever strawberries. She popped another one into her mouth. Only three weeks until summer holidays, her last summer as a regular kid. In seven months she'd be a teenager. And today, this perfect ten day, was Thursday. She brushed off her jeans, picked up the bowl and hummed her way into the house.

"Ta da!" She placed the strawberries on the table, bowed, and with a "Hold the applause!" raced off to the phone.

"Who are you phoning?" her mother asked. "Can't it wait till after breakfast?"

"Krista and Becky. I've got to remind them about something."

"You'll be seeing them in ten minutes." With an exasperated sigh, Heather Steele poured herself another cup of coffee. "Just wait," she said to her husband. "As soon as she gets off the phone she'll remind me about tai chi and tell me she'll be late for supper. Every Tuesday and Thursday, for the last six months, she's said the same thing."

Martin Steele laughed. "I'm not going to bet against that one." He bit into a strawberry. "Mmmm. These

ripened beautifully.”

“They wouldn’t dare not to,” Heather said. “Not with Jasmine growing them.”

“What else can we get her to plant this summer? Corn? Peas?” His mouth watered at the thought. “She’d grow a terrific garden.”

Heather agreed. “She’ll do anything, once she sets her mind to it.”

Jasmine bounded back and slid into her chair. “Don’t forget, Mom, I’ve got tai chi after school so I’ll be late for supper.” She poured herself a heaping bowl of corn flakes and buried them in strawberries.

“How’s Krista? And Becky? Have you got their day organized?”

“Uh-huh. We’re practicing our play at recess and lunch. And I reminded them about the hot dog notice. Have you filled mine out?”

“It’s in your pack.”

“If you’re going shopping we’re out of chocolate chip cookies and there’s only two apples left.” She spread pea nut butter on a piece of toast, covered it with slices of apple, then added a layer of strawberries. “Yum! Do you want a bite, Dad?”

“Heavens no,” he said. “It looks disgusting.”

“You have no taste,” she teased. “And don’t turn up your nose at something till you’ve tried it. Ever heard that before?”

“Isn’t it time you left for school?”

“Don’t worry. Everything’s under control.” She bolted down the rest of her toast and shoved her lunch and home work inside her pack. Then she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, gave her mother and father a peck on the cheek and raced to the door. “Bye! And don’t eat all the strawberries.”

“Be careful,” her mother called after her. “The roads are slippery.”

No problem, Jasmine thought as she tore down the road.

Nothing can go wrong today, not on tai chi Thursday. But what about next month, when the classes were finished?

Well, she’d just have to practice on her own. And there were so many other things she planned to do: swim in the river, camp on the beach, have sleep-overs at least once a week, help her mom work on the quilt so it would be finished for her birthday. And this summer, since she was almost thirteen, she was allowed to take the bus into Victoria. She and her friends could go to movies and malls and do all the city things they couldn’t do in Sooke. And maybe she’d plant a vegetable garden, since the strawberries were such a success.

“Hey, Krista! Becky!” She spun around the corner where her friends were waiting. “Is it too late to plant seeds for corn and stuff like that?”

“I don’t think so,” Krista said. “Why?”

“I’ve got this great idea for a garden. Do you want to help? We could grow pumpkins too and make a scarecrow....” All the way to school they tossed out ideas, too excited to mind the drizzly rain. By the time they wheeled into the bike-racks they had a garden of huge proportions, complete with a goldfish pond and frogs that croaked all night.

“Do you want to come over?” Becky asked, when 3:00 finally came.

“Can’t. It’s-”

“Tai chi!” Krista looked at Becky and laughed. “You should know by now.”

“You should join,” Jasmine said. “It’s great.” “You should take karate with us.”

“No way.” Jasmine grinned.

“If we all started like, Tai chi, you’d switch to karate,” Becky said. “You’re such a non-conformist. Right?”

“Yeah! And proud of it! See you tomorrow-and don’t forget about the garden.” Jasmine tucked her long black braid inside her hood and headed for her bike. The morning drizzle had turned into a regular West Coast down pour, making the roads more slippery than ever. Ignoring the puddles, she sped off to her tai chi class.

“Keep your self-control,” the teacher was saying. “Don’t give in to anger. Remember, taichi must never be

used against another person unless you're in danger. Then, look for a weak spot, maybe the way the person is standing. Take advantage of that weakness. Catch the person off balance."

Jasmine hung onto every word. "Inner strength is being aware of your own power and energy and having control over it. To have inner strength you must concentrate on your lower stomach, because that's where your power is centred. And remember that tai chi is yin and yang working in harmony. The spiritual side is in balance with the physical side."

As she went through the patterned motions, Jasmine thought about her inner strength. She was sure she had it. She could feel it, flowing through her body with every breath.

"Let your arms open as if you're holding the whole world in front of you. Curve your arms downwards and scoop up all this space. Keep your back straight, knees bent. Lift the energy up to your chest."

Jasmine dropped her elbows and rotated her wrists, directing the energy into her lower stomach. She was concentrating so hard she didn't hear the door open or see her teacher walk towards it. She jumped when he tapped her shoulder. "Your dad's here. He wants to talk to you."

She skipped towards the door, eager to show her father the new moves. But the look on his face stopped her abruptly. "Dad? What's--"

"Your mom," he said in a choked voice. He put his arms around her, drawing her close. "There's been an accident."

Somehow, Jasmine left her class, walked down the stairs and got into the car. "She was driving home," her father was saying. "The roads were so slippery, she skidded on a curve, crashed into a tree..." He paused, fighting to control his ragged breathing. "When they got her out she was unconscious but still alive. But...she didn't make it to the hospital."

Jasmine stared fixedly through the rain-streaked windshield, barely hearing her father's words. They fluttered through some distant part of her consciousness like fragments of paper, ripped apart, swept away. What was he talking about? Her mother, dead? No! It was a mistake! She wanted to scream, shout, smash-pound everything back into place, the way it was.

"It can't be," she repeated numbly. Her body throbbed with an overwhelming hurt. She was out of her depth, sinking slowly, with nothing to hold onto, no hope of touching bottom, not even a shred of inner strength to keep her afloat.

And that night, the dreams began.

Users Review

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