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JOHN STEINBECK'S

the pearl

A One-Act Dramatization

By

WARREN FROST



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(THE PEARL)

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THE PEARL
A One Act Play
for Five Men, Four Women, Extras

C H A R A C T E R S

BEGGARthe narrator
KINOa young pearl fisherman
JUANAKino's wife
JUAN TOMASKino's older brother
APOLONIAJuan Tomas' wife
DOCTOR.the local medical expert
MARIAthe doctor's assistant
PEARL BUYERthe local jewel expert
PRIESTthe local religious leader

*PLACE: A fishing village on
the coast of Mexico.*

TIME: Yesterday.

The Pearl

SCENE: The stage is bare except for a large platform at C. The **CAST** sits in the darkness on both sides of the platform. A single pool of light comes up on the **BEGGAR**, who speaks to the audience.

BEGGAR. In the town they tell the story of the great pearl. How it was found and how it was lost again. And because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in every man's mind. And, as with all retold tales that are in people's hearts, there are only good and evil things, and black and white things, and no in-between anywhere. If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it. (The lights come up on the platform to reveal **KINO** and **JUANA**, with their baby.) It is also the story of Kino, the fisherman, his wife, Juana, and the baby, Coyotito. (**JUANA** puts the baby to bed. She sings softly, then turns and watches **KINO**, who still sleeps. After a moment, **KINO** awakes and looks at **JUANA**.)

KINO. You are always awake when I wake. (**JUANA** smiles at **KINO**.) Do you ever sleep?

JUANA. I sleep. (**KINO** smiles back, then shrugs.) I like to

watch you. (KINO rises, moves to the fire, rolls a cake and eats. JUANA continues to watch him.)

KINO. Watch me eat?

JUANA. Yes. Any time.

KINO. You are silly, old woman.

JUANA. Yes! (They laugh softly. KINO rises and crosses down. He stretches and looks about him, admiring the early morning sunrise. JUANA stirs the fire. She looks happily at the baby, then suddenly freezes. Her whispering voice is full of terror.) Kino! Kino! (KINO turns and moves quickly to Juana's side. She whispers one word as she stares in fright at the baby.) Scorpion! (KINO moves cautiously toward the baby. He stops, collects himself, then leaps forward. He is an instant too late. The baby screams in pain. KINO grabs the scorpion and grinds it to dust with his hands. JUANA takes the baby in her arms and sucks blood from the wound. KINO hovers helplessly nearby as his brother, JUAN TOMAS, and his wife, APOLONIA, step into the light.)

KINO. Scorpion!

APOLONIA. Oh! He is so little. (She moves to JUANA.)

JUANA. The doctor! Go for the doctor! (KINO looks helplessly at JUAN TOMAS.)

JUAN TOMAS. He will not come to us.

KINO. Never! He will never come.

JUANA (pleading). Kino . . . the baby!

KINO. He will not come!

JUANA. Then we must go to him! (KINO stares at JUANA in disbelief.) We must! (She picks up the baby. ALL begin a slow march around the platform. The lights begin to pick out OTHERS, who watch and whisper softly among themselves. KINO and JUANA stop downstage as MARIA, a servant girl, steps before them. JUAN TOMAS and APOLONIA stay in the background. The whispering stops.)

MARIA. Yes?

KINO. The little one has been poisoned by the scorpion. He needs the skill of the doctor.

MARIA. I will see if he is in. Wait! (A light comes up on the DOCTOR as MARIA comes up to him. He yawns.) Patron?

DOCTOR. What is it?

MARIA. An Indian with a baby. He says a scorpion stung it.

DOCTOR. Have I nothing better to do but cure insect bites!

MARIA. Yes, Patron.

DOCTOR. Has he money? They never have any money. I'm tired of it. See if he has money.

MARIA. Yes, Patron. (She goes back to KINO and JUANA. The CROWD whispers to one another until MARIA reaches them, then they watch intently. The light stays on the DOCTOR.) Do you have money for treatment? (KINO takes out a small, folded cloth. He hands it to MARIA, who opens it. The cloth contains seed pearls.) One moment. Wait! (She returns to the DOCTOR.) Patron?

DOCTOR. Yes? Yes? (MARIA holds out the packet of pearls.) Seed pearls! They are worthless. Don't you know seed pearls? Go! I am busy. (MARIA returns to KINO and JUANA. The light goes out on the DOCTOR. She hands the packet back to KINO.)

MARIA. The doctor has gone out on a serious case. (MARIA starts to leave. JUANA takes a step toward her.)

JUANA. Maria! My baby is sick. (MARIA stops, but does not turn to look at JUANA.) You are my friend. We played as children. My baby is sick!

MARIA. The doctor has gone out. (She crosses out of the light, leaving KINO and JUANA alone. KINO strikes out viciously, as though hitting the door. He puts his arm around JUANA and they start back to their hut. JUAN TOMAS shakes his head sadly, then he and APOLONIA follow. The CROWD

keens softly as the lights on them fade out. KINO and JUANA arrive at the hut. She hands the baby to KINO. As the BEGGAR speaks, she crosses downstage on the platform, kneels and gathers seaweed from the sea. The soft keening continues.)
BEGGAR. She gathered seaweed from the sea. (JUAN returns to the baby and applies seaweed to its shoulder.) It was an old remedy and probably as good as any the doctor might have had. But it lacked his authority because it was simple and did not cost anything.

KINO. Will it work?

JUANA (intensely). Do not be foolish. (She pauses, then softens.) I am sorry. I am frightened. (She cradles the baby in her arms.)

KINO. It will work, I am sure. (JUANA smiles at him sadly.)

JUANA. You are such a boy. It is all I know. Go! To your canoe. I will watch him.

KINO. If only the doctor . . .

JUANA. He does not have to help us. Go! Do your work. Find the pearls. Time! We will see. (After a beat, KINO crosses off the platform into the darkness. JUANA lays the baby down gently. She kneels beside it, crosses herself, and begins her prayer. The lights fade to a spot on her. The keening stops.) Dear Blessed Mother. My little one. He is so small. He has such need. With all your wisdom, please, in his time of need, grant him a moment more of good life. Let Kino find the pearl that we may pay the doctor for his wisdom. In the name of your Son, I pray thee . . . Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed . . . (The spot fades as Juana's voice trails away. When only her outline remains, the BEGGAR appears in a pool of light.)

BEGGAR. Her lonely vigil continued. Fear began to take the place of hope for the baby was so little and no authority had been used in the cure. Time was her ally, though she had no

way of knowing. (The lights brighten around JUANA. KINO leaps excitedly onto the platform, then stands motionless. JUANA looks up at him and sees something in his eyes which she doesn't understand.)

JUANA. Kino? You look strange.

KINO. I am the same. The boy?

JUANA. He is the same. You are different.

KINO. Perhaps!

JUANA (exasperated). Kino! (KINO takes out a large, closed oyster shell and holds it out to JUANA. She does not know what to make of it. KINO sits by her. The soft keening begins again.)

KINO. Before I touched it, it closed. (He stares at the shell, transfixed.)

JUANA. That is all?

KINO. I thought I saw . . . something.

JUANA. What?

KINO. I thought I saw a pearl. (JUANA realizes that KINO means more than what he is saying. The keening grows more intense as KINO takes his knife and opens the shell. Within is the Pearl of the World. They stare at it for a moment. The keening builds around them. KINO removes the pearl from the shell and holds it to the light as the keening reaches a crescendo. KINO screams with delight. The keening stops. After a moment, JUANA breaks the silence.)

JUANA. It is beautiful!

KINO. Yes.

JUANA. Is it real?

KINO. Perhaps a seagull laid it. (JUANA looks at him in fright. KINO smiles, releasing her fears.)

JUANA. I do not believe it. I do not! (The baby makes a laughing sound. JUANA and KINO rush to the baby as it laughs again.) He is better! He is better!

KINO. Yes! It is the pearl, Juana. The pearl! Now we can have everything. Everything!

JUANA (not quite certain that she can trust her joy). I do not know what everything is. (The lights begin to fade. The keening builds very slowly in intensity and energy. The pool of light comes up on the BEGGAR.)

BEGGAR. A town has a nervous system that mysteriously spreads news faster than small boys can dart and run. Soon the nerves of the town were vibrating with the news that Kino had found the Pearl of the World. The news, like a tinderred fire, swept past the brush huts to the stone and plaster part of the town. (A spot comes up on a PRIEST, who is watering his flowers.) It came to the priest in his garden and his eyes grew thoughtful as he recalled certain repairs necessary to his church. Who were they, these finders of such a pearl? Had he married them? Baptized their children? (The spot fades on the PRIEST and a spot comes up on the DOCTOR.) The doctor was musing about his former life on the continent before ill fate and malpractice had suggested a change of climate. The news of the pearl reminded him of a house call he should make. (The spot fades on the DOCTOR and a spot comes up on the PEARL BUYER.) The pearl buyer heard the news and was most affected by it. If Kino had found the Pearl of the World, the man's reward could be beyond belief. (The spot fades on the PEARL BUYER. The keening builds.) Kino's pearl went into every man's dreams. Dreams went to wishes. And wishes to lusts. Without warning, something infinitel[ly] evil and black stirred in the town. Like the cancer of loneliness when love is withheld, the poison sacs of the town swelled and puffed with the venom of envy! (A spot picks out KINO.) Suddenly only one person seemed to stand in the way of every man's dream. Kino became the enemy! (The keening

stops abruptly. Lights come up on KINO, JUANA, JUAN TOMAS and APOLONIA in the hut. JUANA and APOLONIA are chattering silently.)

JUAN TOMAS. What will you do now? (JUANA and APOLONIA stop and look at KINO.)

KINO. We will be married by the priest. (The CHORUS repeats "married" in urgent whispers several times.) The baby will be baptized! (The CHORUS repeats "baptized" in urgent whispers several times.) We will buy new clothes! (The CHORUS repeats "clothes" in urgent whispers several times.) And a rifle! Perhaps a rifle! (The CHORUS repeats "rifle" in urgent whispers several times.) And my son will read and open the books, and my son will write and know writing. These things he will know and they will make us free! (The CHORUS repeats "free" in urgent whispers several times.) This the pearl will do! (The light fades up on the BEGGAR.)

BEGGAR. From this day forward all time will be dated from Kino's pearl. If his dream comes true, each will remember this moment when Kino became a great man. (The keening begins.) But if his plans fail, this would be the moment when madness had come and it would be no surprise to any of them. Such is the wisdom of men! (Suddenly, the PRIEST hovers over the family.) The priest had not visited the Indians in some time. (The light fades out on the BEGGAR.)

PRIEST. My children! (He blesses them as ALL kneel before him.) Kino, thou art named after a great man, and a great father of the church. Did you know that? It is in the books.

KINO. My son will know the books!

PRIEST. A fine thought, my son. It has come to me that you have had good fortune! (KINO looks at the PRIEST for a moment, then holds the pearl before him. The PRIEST can hardly believe what he sees, but he is a master of all situations.) I hope thou will remember to give thanks to Him who has given this treasure.

KINO. Yes, Father.

PRIEST. God be with you! And remember, the church has needs, too. (The PRIEST leaves. KINO smiles and looks at the OTHERS as the keening begins again.)

JUANA. He has blessed our house!

APOLONIA. He is a great man!

JUAN TOMAS. With a pious thirst! (ALL look at JUAN TOMAS. Before they can respond, the DOCTOR stands before them. The keening stops.)

DOCTOR. I came as quickly as I could.

KINO. The baby is nearly well.

DOCTOR. Sometimes, my friend, the scorpion's sting has a curious effect. There will seem to be improvement, then, without warning, puff! (The words are frightening.) Sometimes, blindness. A withered leg. A crumpled back. I know the sting of the scorpion. I can cure it. (KINO and JUANA hesitate for a moment, then stand aside as the DOCTOR goes to the baby and examines it. The keening starts again.) As I thought. The poison has moved inward. It will strike soon! (JUANA gives a soft cry.) I will give him something to turn the poison aside. (The DOCTOR takes something from his pocket and gives it to the baby, then rises.) He is so little. Perhaps I was in time. It is a pity I was not in when you came. We shall see! We shall see! (The DOCTOR leaves as KINO, JUANA, JUAN TOMAS and APOLONIA stand over the baby. The DOCTOR walks into a light, checks his watch, then walks away as the light fades out and comes up on the BEGGAR.)

BEGGAR. What we do not understand always seems a mystery to us. Standing helpless before the gods of healing is the most mysterious of all. (KINO, JUANA, JUAN TOMAS and APOLONIA kneel in prayer. The keening grows until it is suddenly stopped by the baby's wail. The DOCTOR appears again out of the darkness.)