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*Dramatic Publishing*

# THE LAND OF THE DRAGON

A Chinese Fantasy

by

MADGEMILLER



# THE LAND OF THE DRAGON

Stylized Chinese play, done in the ancient  
and delightful Chinese manner.

*Chinese fantasy. By Madge Miller. Cast: 3m., 5w., 1 either gender, or 9w.* The lovely princess Jade Pure is held practically captive by her jealous scheming step-aunt and her chancellor. Road Wanderer, a minstrel, passing through the country with his pet dragon, learns of her plight and rescues her but disappears when she seems to him thoughtless and unkind. Making an effort to find him, Jade Pure decrees that the man she marries must have a pet dragon, and in the next scene two false dragons arrive, awkwardly practicing dragon ways and scrambling for safety when they catch a glimpse of each other. Road Wanderer escapes from captivity just in time to save Jade Pure from a fatal marriage. *Empty stage with portable properties, Chinese and dragon costumes. Suitable for all-female cast. Code: LF4.*

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The Land of the Dragon



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Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(THE LAND OF THE DRAGON)

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# THE LAND OF THE DRAGON

## Cast

JADE PURE, Princess of the Southern Kingdom

PRECIOUS HARP, Aunt to Jade Pure

TWENTY-FIRST COUSIN

TWENTY-SECOND COUSIN

TWENTY-THIRD COUSIN

} Maids to Jade Pure

ROAD WANDERER, A Student

COVET SPRING, Chancellor of the Southern Kingdom

TWENTY-FOURTH COUSIN, A Farmer

SMALL ONE, A Dragon

THE STAGE MANAGER

THE PROPERTY MAN (non-speaking)

NOTE: If a larger cast is desired, guards, townspeople, etc., indicated as voices offstage, may be played on-stage by additional actors.

TIME: In those days

PLACE: The Land of the Dragon

## Synopsis

### PART ONE

Scene 1. Jade Pure's apartment.

Scene 2. A distant field.

Scene 3. Royal garden, outside the Princess' window.

Scene 4. A grassy meadow.

Scene 5. A city street.

Scene 6. Jade Pure's apartment.

Scene 7. Royal Garden.

### INTERMISSION

### PART TWO

Scene 1. A lonely field.

Scene 2. Before the palace wall.

Scene 3. A dungeon.

Scene 4. Jade Pure's apartment.

Scene 5. The royal throne-room.

Scene 6. A lonely field.

.....

This play was given its premiere production  
in 1945, by the Children's Theatre of Pitts-  
burgh, under the direction of Miss Grace Price.

.....

# THE LAND OF THE DRAGON

## PART ONE

*(The curtains remain open throughout. The stage is completely empty. A handsome curtain, black with a red-and-gold dragon painted on it, is hung without folds across the back.)*

*Chinese music—recorded—is played for several minutes before the lights come up on stage, indicating the beginning of the play. The Stage Manager enters right. He is gorgeously dressed, carries an ornamental fan which he uses gracefully, and hops, rather than walks, with short bobbing steps.)*

## SCENE ONE

**STAGE MANAGER** (*bowing*). Greetings, Exalted Audience. You are most welcome. May the humble efforts of our actors to please you meet with flowery success. I am the Stage Manager, here to introduce to you each scene as it unfolds. You must pay no attention to me, for to a POLITE audience I am invisible!

*(The Property Man has entered with a small black bench which he places center stage. He—or she—is dressed entirely in black, including black gloves. He shuffles with maddening slowness; his face is vacant and sleepy-looking.)*

This lazy fellow is our Property Man. He, too should be invisible as he prepares the stage. The first scene takes place in the apartment of the lovely and gracious Jade Pure, Princess of the Southern Kingdom. There is the door, as you can plainly see . . .

*(The Property Man opens an imaginary door, steps through it, and closes the door after him.)*

And there the window . . .

*(The Property Man opens an imaginary window, thrusts his head out and in again, then closes the window and shuffles offstage.)*

But our play begins. Approaching us is the Princess Jade Pure herself. I bow to you, and respectfully withdraw.

*(He bows and steps to the extreme downstage right of the stage, where he stands throughout the play. Jade Pure, charmingly but simply dressed in lavender and silver, enters, crosses to center stage, turns to face the audience.)*

**JADE PURE.** I am Jade Pure, Princess of the Southern Kingdom. The death of my father, the Emperor, some years ago, left me an orphan, and alone. Sorrowfully I seat myself to await the coming of my cousins and the start of another lonely day.

*(As she is seating herself, the three Cousins enter right, one fol-*



lowing another, the tallest first. They come down center stage, turn to face the audience in the same movement, hiding the Princess from view in their speeches. They are richly dressed; Twenty-First Cousin's costume is predominantly green, Twenty-Second Cousin's, blue; Twenty-Third Cousin's, orange.)

COUSINS (*in unison*). We are . . .

TWENTY-FIRST (*bowing*). Twenty-First Cousin . . .

TWENTY-SECOND (*bowing*). Twenty-Second Cousin . . .

TWENTY-THIRD (*bowing*). Twenty-Third Cousin . . .

COUSINS. Honorable Ladies in the service of Her Highness, the Princess Jade Pure.

(*leaning forward, fingers to lips*) What we really think of her, you will learn most promptly.

(*Twenty-First Cousin and Twenty-Second Cousin step to the left, Twenty-Third Cousin to the right, and bow to the Princess. They remain bent over until she speaks to them. Their attitude toward her is one of thinly-veiled insolence*).

Good morning, Your Most Gracious Augustness . . .

TWENTY-FIRST. Daughter to the Sun . . .

TWENTY-SECOND. Sister to the Moon . . .

TWENTY-THIRD. Cousin to each dazzling star!

JADE PURE (*stretching out her hands*). Good morning, dear cousins.

TWENTY-FIRST (*circling to her left to stand behind the bench*). Will this unworthy one be granted the inestimable privilege of arranging Her Highness' hair?

TWENTY-SECOND (*taking Jade's left hand*). And I, the care of the five nails on this, the Princess' left hand?

TWENTY-THIRD (*taking her right hand*). And I, the five remaining here?

JADE PURE. Yes, yes, yes. Begin, I beg of you. And cheer my heart with some gay tale, for I am bitterly unhappy.

(*The Cousins arrange her hair, buff her nails with imaginary equipment, as they speak*).

TWENTY-FIRST (*pretending astonishment*). Unhappy? You, the Princess of the Southern Kingdom?

TWENTY-SECOND. How can this be so?

TWENTY-THIRD (*with a titter*). And why?

JADE. You know as well as I!

FIRST (*nodding wisely*). Ah, yes, to be sure.

SECOND. In just one week you celebrate your eighteenth birthday.

FIRST. If you are not wed, when the clock strikes noon that day, you shall lose all claim to the throne.

THIRD. And Lady Precious Harp, sister to your father, shall ascend it.

JADE (*sighing deeply*). Yes.

SECOND. Empress you cannot be unless you first become a wife.

THIRD. But no man yet has sought your hand, because . . . (*pausing deliberately*).

JADE. Because?

FIRST. You ask?

SECOND (*maliciously*). All know the reason why.

THIRD. Does not the Princess?

JADE. Yes, yes. Because my face is ugly. Do not hesitate to say it.

COUSINS (*scornfully*). Ugly, ugly, ugly!

JADE (*springing up*). Cruel, hateful word!

COUSINS (*drawing back*). We have offended you?

JADE (*her hands over face*). You have! You have!

FIRST (*haughtily*). You have offended us, Your Highness!

SECOND. First you bid us speak—

THIRD. And then you storm!

(*With quick mincing steps they have lined up, facing rigidly front*).

JADE. Ah . . . pardon, cousins.

COUSINS (*turning with one motion to the door, starting forward*).  
We go!

JADE (*placing herself between them and the exit*). O, do not! I have no one else to talk to. Well I know you speak the truth. My aunt, Lady Precious Harp, and Covet Spring, the Chancellor, say it too. They and you say that I am ugly, and I see no one else. And yet . . . come near, dear cousin.

(*She takes Twenty-First Cousin's hand and draws her close; with the other hand she touches lightly the girl's eyelids and eyebrows, and then her own*).

You have eyes set so . . . and brows above them. So do I!

FIRST (*pulling away quickly*). But they are not the same!

JADE (*turning to Twenty-Second Cousin*). And see . . . your nose is fashioned so . . . and mine feels very like.

SECOND. Oh, nothing like!

JADE (*following the same procedure with Twenty-Third*). Mouths cannot be so very different, when their sizes are so nearly one. And what else is there? Skin . . . but mine is soft; my fingers tell me. Hair . . . you dress it well.

FIRST (*her back to the Princess*). Extremely well!

JADE (*going to her*). Then let me see for myself! Bring me a mirror, cousins . . .

(*to Twenty-First, who, back turned, shakes her head vigorously*)  
. . . (*to Twenty-Second, who duplicates her sister's action*) . . .

dear cousin

(*to Twenty-Third, who does likewise*).

It is my coiffure I wish to see . . . truly that is all!

COUSINS (*turning to face her, arms folded primly, in unison*). No, no, no! "By order of the Lady Precious Harp, Her Highness Princess Jade Pure shall not be permitted—"

JADE. I know. "Shall not be permitted to possess a mirror." But, I beg you, cousins, tell me why.

FIRST. We have told you, many times.

SECOND. It is for your sake alone.

THIRD (*Mockingly*). You are much too ugly!

JADE. Shall I never marry then?

SECOND. You have had no suitors.

FIRST. None could ever love you.

JADE (*moving restlessly to the imaginary window*). Shall I stay in here forever, with no mirror and no suitors, never to go outside to the garden I see from my window?

THIRD (*with a derisive titter*). No doubt!

JADE. But then I am a prisoner, no better off than my tiny caged bird here!

(*The Property Man has shuffled on with a gilded cut-out bird-cage which he holds aloft; Jade touches it lightly as she speaks to the imaginary bird inside*).

Do you hate it too, poor thing? Why, where are your seeds! almost gone? And very little water! Cousins, you have not been kind to him;

(*They ignore her*).

I shall go to bring fresh water and seeds myself.

(*She exits left*).

FIRST (*flouncing down on the bench*). Let her, then!

(*She extends her hands to her sisters standing at either end of the bench; they buff her nails just as they have done Jade Pure's*).

SECOND. How restless she becomes!

THIRD. There is no chance of her escaping?

FIRST. None. A guard stays at the door.

SECOND. The window is too high.

THIRD. And she has no friends to help.

FIRST. Our vigil will be ended soon. In just a week Lady Precious Harp becomes Empress. Ouch!

(*She pulls her hand away from Twenty-Third Cousin, glaring at her and then at her fingers. The Property Man who, listing to the right, is about to doze off, pulls himself upright with a start*).

SECOND. Will she reward us as she promised?

THIRD. Can we trust her? She is crafty.

FIRST. We can be as sly as she. But truly, she is clever. Who else would have thought of such a scheme?

SECOND. To spread word throughout the kingdom that Jade Pure is very ugly . . .

THIRD. So that she will not be wed before her eighteenth birthday . . .

FIRST. And so that Precious Harp herself can claim the throne as next in line! A clever woman!

SECOND. What if someone learns of the Princess' beauty?

FIRST. Stupid! How? There is no way.

THIRD. What if Jade Pure learns of it herself?

FIRST. She never can, with no one near to tell her, and no mirror. Ouch!

(*She pulls her hand away from Twenty-Second Cousin, regards her nails tenderly. The Property Man, who has listed to the left, again jerks upright, awakened by her shriek*).

That is why she cannot go outside into the garden. There are pools and streams of water there.

SECOND. She might see her face in one of them.

THIRD. Or see a gardener.

FIRST. Exactly. (*rising quickly*) Hush . . . someone is coming.

SECOND (*looking off right*). Lady Precious Harp . . .

**THIRD.** And Covet Spring.

*(They enter right. Lady Precious Harp, a coldly handsome woman in her thirties, is exquisitely costumed in royal yellow, bright with gold and jewels. Covet Spring, a corpulent wheezing ancient, wears red, and carries a huge fan which he flutters affectedly. The Property Man sighs deeply, and rests the bird-cage on his hip, assuming a comfortable position).*

**COUSINS** (*bowing*). Most hearty greetings to Her Exalted Ladyship.

**PRECIOUS HARP** (*arrogantly*). I, Lady Precious Harp, sister to the dear departed Emperor, graciously accept your unworthy greetings.

**COUSINS** (*bowing*). We bow in welcome to His Mighty Excellency.

**COVET SPRING** (*also arrogantly*). I, Covet Spring, Chancellor of the Southern Kingdom, nod in reply.

**PRECIOUS HARP** (*after glancing about, in sudden alarm*). Where is the Princess, my niece? Where is she? Speak!

**COVET SPRING**. She has not escaped?

**FIRST**. No. She has gone to fetch water for that wretched bird.

**PRECIOUS HARP**. Do not leave her unattended for a moment!

*(to Twenty-third Cousin, who exits)*

You—run quickly to watch her. "A single false move loses the game."

**COVET SPRING**. She might find a pane of glass in which to see her face, or a polished kettle.

*(fanning himself violently)* That would be a tragedy!

**PRECIOUS HARP**. It would indeed. For, knowing her own beauty, she might prove troublesome. I should much regret using violence until after I am Empress.

**FIRST**. Have no fear. We shall watch her diligently, mindful of the generous reward you have promised my sisters and me.

**SECOND** (*pointedly*). The most generous reward!

**PRECIOUS HARP** (*coldly*). Reward . . . ah, yes.

**FIRST**. You had not forgotten?

**PRECIOUS HARP**. Indeed not. Faithful servants should be fittingly repaid, and so you will be—most fittingly, when I ascend the throne.

**FIRST**. (*boldly*). And not a moment later!

*(aside to her sister)* I mistrust her tone of voice.

PRECIOUS HARP (*aside to Covet Spring*). Fittingly repaid indeed!  
They know too much!

COVET SPRING (*to her, his fan vibrating vigorously*). Impertinent maids!

PRECIOUS HARP (*ducking, touching her hair disturbed by the breeze*). Only take care that your tongue does not wag too saucily, girl, when speaking to your betters.

FIRST (*aside*). Old witch!

SECOND (*aside*). Fat rogue!

COVET SPRING. Here is the Princess.  
*(He and Precious Harp bow slightly as Jade re-enters with imaginary cups of water and seeds; Twenty-Third Cousin follows).*

JADE. Welcome, worthy aunt and noble Chancellor.

PRECIOUS HARP (*falsely sweet*). Sweet child, good-day. How is my niece?

JADE (*busying herself at the cage which the Property Man quickly holds up in position again*). In good health, thank you. And you?

PRECIOUS HARP. Well enough, well enough. But my thoughts are sorrowful when they dwell on you. Dear child, your eighteenth birthday draws near.

COVET SPRING. And still no husband! Not one suitor even! What a pity!

PRECIOUS HARP. My poor ugly pet, I grieve for you. The throne is yours if you but marry. Think—if this birthday comes, and you remain unwed, I must be Empress! I who dislike intensely any pomp and show. I who loathe power, and have no wish to rule the land!

COVET SPRING. She who is but a simple soul content to paint on silk, and stroll the garden paths!  
*(Jade has turned from the cage to them; the Property Man exits with it, yawning).*

JADE. I should be glad to change the name of Princess then for yours, to be allowed to go outdoors. May I slip out for just an hour or two? There is no one near to be frightened by my ugliness. Please . . . just an hour!

PRECIOUS HARP (*coldly*). My sweet niece, no.

COVET SPRING. Be guided by your aunt, your father's sister, in whose charge he placed you.

PRECIOUS HARP (*as Jade Pure turns sorrowfully away, placing a hand gingerly on her shoulder*). There! I shall be generous. Come with us as we leave, and you may glance just once out of

the door. For just a moment it will be held open, for your single look. Come, child.

JADE (*following her as she exits*). Oh, thank you, thank you!

COVET SPRING (*as he exits*). Lady Precious Harp is ever gracious!

(*The Cousins, who have bowed as the others exited, now straighten and look at each other*).

THIRD. Ugh! What a dreadful pair!

SECOND. Such arrogance!

FIRST (*furious*). Servants! We are of the royal blood as well as she!

SECOND. But only distantly related.

THIRD: Do you know, I almost wish a suitor might arrive in time to wed the princess.

(*giggling*) Then old Precious Harp would howl!

FIRST. Why should she have the throne?

SECOND. How can we stop her?

FIRST (*suddenly*). Sisters, I have a plan of plans! A suitor shall arrive!

SECOND. But who?

FIRST. Our brother, Twenty-Fourth Cousin!

THIRD. Our Farmer-brother?

SECOND. That simple-minded lout?

THIRD (*with a titter*). Without two coins in his ragged smock!

SECOND (*also tittering*). A suitor to the Princess?

FIRST (*sharply*). Be still and listen. True, he is nothing as he is, but what is to prevent our buying splendid robes, and teaching him court manners?

THIRD (*giggling*). But a suitor to Jade Pure!

FIRST (*clutching her arm*). Think! Is there any other who seeks her hand? Where are his rivals?

SECOND (*slowly*). Why . . . why, there is not a one!

FIRST. Exactly! Since there is no other, he will be crowned Emperor.

THIRD. But what of us?

FIRST. We shall rule through him, the poor weak thing. He has no mind or spirit of his own!

SECOND. But do you think it will succeed? She might refuse him!

**FIRST.** What? Refuse a foreign prince bedecked in jewels, dazzling as a peacock, bringing costly gifts? Come, we must send for Twenty-Fourth Cousin.

**SECOND.** Dear brother!

**THIRD.** Dear, dear brother!

*(They exit right, hastily, in great excitement).*

**JADE** *(entering right, looking back).* Where do my cousins go so hastily? Just see, they walk out through the door as if it were a simple thing. But I, the Princess, may not leave!

*(at the window)* They cross the garden when they please, but I remain shut up day after day.

*(A bird trill is sounded from offstage; the Property Man runs tardily in with the cage, to which Jade goes).*

Will you sing in your cage, little bird? I cannot sing in mine.

*(suddenly)* But there is something I can do; I can set you free, poor prisoner. Here, perch upon my finger . . .

*(The Property Man shuffles off with the cage) . . .*

carefully now . . . I shall bring you to the open window. There . . . slip between the bars . . . go free!

*(a second trill from offstage)*

I must remain!

*(She exits left, hands to her face. The Property Man enters to carry off the bench; the Stage Manager steps forward, bows, and speaks).*

## SCENE TWO

**STAGE MANAGER:** For the next scene of our illustrious play, we are transported to this distant field. The sun shines hot upon the earth; the farmer with his plow draws near.

*(He steps back, as Twenty-Fourth Cousin enters right, plowing his field with an imaginary handplow. He is a meek little man, guileless and cheerful in appearance; his costume is a drab brown and gray, and quite shabby; a large hat rests on the back of his head. When he reaches center stage he stops, straightens, draws a hand across his forehead, removes his hat, and holding it in front of him, turns to the audience).*

**TWENTY-FOURTH.** I am, as you see, a simple farmer, yet Twenty-Fourth Cousin to the ugly Princess Jade Pure, whom my sisters serve. They are fashionable ladies accustomed to court life, but I have no desire to go to the City. I am a farmer. Now you see me plowing my field.



*(And he begins again, taking no notice of happy whistling offstage. Road Wanderer enters right; he is a sturdy handsome young man, carelessly dressed in bright if tattered clothes: patches of all colors are splashed over them).*

ROAD WANDERER *(to the audience, modestly)*. I am Road Wanderer, the humble hero of this play. You will learn more of me as I talk with the good farmer.

TWENTY-FOURTH *(who has straightened, and is watching him)*. Good-day, sir.

ROAD WANDERER. Good-day to you, sir.

*(calling offstage)* Go back, Small One, and wait. Mrograff . . . uzcark!

TWENTY-FOURTH *(his eyes wide, but politely)*. You are with a friend?

ROAD WANDERER. Why, yes. My—my watch dog.

TWENTY-FOURTH *(eagerly)*. I have a great fondness for dogs, sir. May I perhaps see this one of yours?

ROAD WANDERER *(doubtfully)*. He is . . . of an unusual type: Tell me, friend, how do you call yourself?

TWENTY-FOURTH. Twenty-fourth Cousin . . . that is, twenty-four times removed from the royal family. I am a farmer, as you see.

ROAD WANDERER *(sitting down, pretending to lean against a tree)*. I do. Is this your tree that I sit down beneath, and lean my back against?

*(The Property Man has shuffled in with a tree branch, stylized, which he waves languidly over Road Wanderer's head).*

TWENTY-FOURTH. It is.

*(proudly)* All this is mine,

*(pointing)* and that small cottage . . . O, it is little enough. My sisters say that it is nothing. They are elegant ladies who serve the ugly Princess Jade Pure in the palace.

ROAD WANDERER. Indeed! What would they say of me who has no more than Small One, and my health?

TWENTY-FOURTH. You have no house?

ROAD WANDERER. I want no house. I am a student who wanders here and there, to and fro.

TWENTY-FOURTH. See here, how do you live? What do you eat?

ROAD WANDERER. That is simple, very simple. I have many friends.

TWENTY-FOURTH. Oh?

ROAD WANDERER. They bring me the ripest fruits from the top-most branches, the tenderest roots from below the ground, the sweetest honey, the choicest nuts.

TWENTY-FOURTH (*pushing his hat back on his head*). What are these friends of yours? Magicians?

ROAD WANDERER. No. They are the birds, the insects, the creatures that climb and dig and swim . . . in short, all animals known to me.

TWENTY-FOURTH. They are all your friends? But why? How?

ROAD WANDERER. I know a secret. I am one who can speak and understand their many languages.

TWENTY-FOURTH (*scratching his head in bewilderment*). My ancestors! Whose languages?

ROAD WANDERER. Why, the languages of my friends, the animals. The speech of every smallest one of them is known to me.

TWENTY-FOURTH. Ho! That I cannot believe. You are joking with me.

ROAD WANDERER (*sitting up*). I swear it is the truth. I learned it in my wanderings. Show me the creature I cannot converse with.

TWENTY-FOURTH (*looking about*). But . . . but there is no creature here. Ah, wait . . . I have it! Your pet—your dog! Call him here!

ROAD WANDERER (*rising hastily*). No, no . . . not Small One.

TWENTY-FOURTH. A-ha! You dare not try!

ROAD WANDERER. It is for your sake that I—

TWENTY-FOURTH. You shall prove what you say!

(*calling offstage*) Here, Small One! Come, boy, come!

ROAD WANDERER. Wait! It is no dog!

TWENTY-FOURTH. Good Dog! Come here!

(*his voice raising to a shriek of terror*) Oh . . . oh . . . oh!

(*Small One, a medium-sized highly-colored dragon, enters with a bound and a roar*)

A dragon! Help! A dragon! Save me!

(*For a moment there is a lively chase: Twenty-Fourth Cousin finally collapses on his knees, clinging to Road Wanderer*).

ROAD WANDERER. There! Do you see? Small one, araf . . . err-gad.

TWENTY-FOURTH (*moaning*). Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . .