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*Dramatic Publishing*

*"Precious Jade is a gem."  
—The Ellsworth American*

# *Precious Jade*



*Book and lyrics by Carol Korty  
Music by Shu-Hui Chen*

# Precious Jade

*Drama with music. Book and lyrics by Carol Korty. Music by Shu-Hui Chen. Freely based on "The Young Head of the Family" by Adele M. Fielde. Cast: 8m., 7w., 5 to 15 either gender. Or 4m., 4w. with doubling.* An arranged marriage of a young woman, Precious Jade, is brokered to help solve the problems of a floundering family in rural southern China at the end of the 19th century. Precious Jade, a spirited girl, is determined to find a way to make life interesting and bearable in this highly structured society. Through her wits and recollection of advice and stories from a dearly loved grandmother, she is able to win over the members of her new family. Her final success lies in gaining the heart and support of her reluctant husband. And in the bargain she outsmarts a condescending trader and an arrogant magistrate. The style of the script combines elements of traditional Chinese theatre with Western theatre. Perhaps the most noticeable custom from Chinese opera is having characters introduce themselves in song when first appearing on stage or reappearing after a long absence. In addition to the songs of introduction, there are other songs dealing with feelings, wishes and determinations. The lyrics of all may be sung or spoken—director's choice. The use of percussion to underscore action is another tradition from Chinese opera applied throughout. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: PHI.*

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Book and lyrics by  
CAROL KORTY

Music by  
SHU-HUI CHEN

Freely based on  
“The Young Head of the Family” by  
Adele M. Fielde



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Book and lyrics by CAROL KORTY

Music by SHU-HUI CHEN

“Tongues of Jade” and “The Khan’s Daughter” by Laurence Yep

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(PRECIOUS JADE)

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*Precious Jade* premiered at the Meetinghouse Theatre Lab, Winter Harbor, Maine, December 9, 2010, with the following:

Director . . . . . Carol Korty  
Costume Design . . . . . Pauline Angione\* & Carol Korty  
Lighting Design . . . . . Pauline Angione & Richard Chevalier\*  
Set Design . . . . . Carol Korty  
Art Design . . . . . Christine McGowan  
Musical Direction . . . . . Gary Bushee\*  
Vocal Direction . . . . . Joyce Newkirk  
Assistant Vocal Direction . . . . . Christina McGowan

#### CAST

Precious Jade . . . . . Jessie Michaela Roach  
Father Cheng, Magistrate . . . . . Carl Karush  
Matchmaker (Dee Dee Wong) . . . . . Joyce Newkirk  
Da Mu, Water Carrier (Shu Mu) . . . . . Chris Urquhart\*  
Da Lin, Gem Dealer (Yip Ming Dur) . . . . . Tony Cox  
Da Sen, Cloth Vendor (Sin Wei) . . . . . Stephen Murdoch  
Mei Ling, Paper Vendor (Li Ming) . . . . . Alyssa Kelley  
Shu Fong . . . . . Kierra Kaspata  
Lotus . . . . . Christina McGowan  
Duck Farmer (Lee Ho) . . . . . Mary Wilson  
Attendant to the Magistrate . . . . . Mack Kelley  
Assistant to Duck Farmer . . . . . Axis Fuksman-Kumpa  
Assistant to Duck Farmer . . . . . Ella Meera Reilich Godino  
Assistant to Water Carrier . . . . . Hunter Rivers  
Wind Cloth . . . . . Lisa Reilich\*

## MUSICIANS

Flute/Wind Instruments . . . . . Jon Archer  
Pipa/Strings. . . . . Gary Bushee\*  
Percussion . . . . . Irene Cortese & Emma Hurley

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Manager . . . . . Lisa Reilich\*  
Stage Manager. . . . . Mellie Anderson\*  
Assistant Stage Manager . . . . . Amanda Russell-Bolio\*  
Property Handlers. . . . . David Draheim & Judith Toland\*  
Set Construction . . . . Barbara & Mike Doti, Dale Macurdy  
Tim McCormick\* & Chris Urquhart\*  
Wardrobe Mistress. . . . . Pauline Angione\*  
Costume Sewers . . . . . Doris Coombs, Ruth Sargent &  
Essie Sherman  
Makeup. . . . . Barbara Doti & Bianka Fuksman  
Photography . . . . . Pauline Angione\* & Dale Macurdy  
Web Design. . . . . Pauline Angione\*  
Facilitator . . . . . Charles Alexander\*  
House Manager . . . . . David Draheim\* & Cynthia Thayer\*

\* *The Meetinghouse Theatre Lab 2004/2005 Ensemble Member*



# PRECIOUS JADE

## CHARACTERS

Casting note:

8 actors (4w and 4m.) can play all 17 speaking roles in this script. The script can as easily accommodate a cast larger than 17 with the addition of musicians, prop people and villagers.

Gender is not an absolute requirement in casting. Traditional Chinese opera was performed by men handling all roles. In this spirit, a director might elect to have the male and female roles played by men or women, boys or girls.

**PRECIOUS JADE:** A young farm girl, smart, lively, eager to learn, recently married to Da Sen.

**FATHER CHENG:** An elderly farmer of means, widower, father of Da Mu, Da Lin and Da Sen.

**DA MU:** Eldest son of Cheng family, traditionalist, married to Mei Ling.

**DA LIN:** Second son of Cheng family, hot-tempered, married to Shu Fong.

**DA SEN:** Third son of Cheng family, wishes to study, recently married to Precious Jade.

**MEI LING:** Young wife of Da Mu, beautiful, shy, fearful.

**SHU FONG:** Young wife of Da Lin, unsure of self, skilled cook.

LOTUS: Servant to Cheng family.

MATCHMAKER: Dee Dee Wong, a nosy village woman who negotiates arranged marriages.

CLOTH VENDOR (Villager 1): Sin Wei.

PAPER VENDOR (Villager 2): Li Ming.

WATER CARRIER (Villager 3): Shu Mu

DUCK FARMER (Villager 4): Lee Ho.

MAGISTRATE: Autocratic, governmental official in charge of the district.

ATTENDANT(S): 1 or 2 servants to Magistrate.

GEM DEALER: Yip Ming Dur. Wily businessman from capitol city out to dupe country folk.

PROP PERSON: Neutral character who hands props to actors as needed.

THE WIND: Long silk scarf on stick manipulated by an actor.

MUSICIANS: One or more performers or actors of company who assume this role when not playing a character.

If actors who sing cannot be secured, the lyrics of songs might be spoken by the characters. In this case, it would be good to have the melody played under the words as they are spoken.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

### CASTING STRATEGIES

#### SMALL CAST (8 performers):

By doubling, all speaking roles can be played by 8 actors, according to the scheme given below.

Prop Person could be eliminated, and actors could pick up and dispose of props themselves, either within view or behind screen or curtain.

The Wind could be manipulated by whichever actor is available or by stage manager.

Musicians could be eliminated altogether if the play is done without music.

Or a CD of the melodies could be recorded and played by the stage manager to accompany songs. Actors could add live percussion onstage whenever possible to accompany themselves and others' action.

WOMAN 1: Precious Jade

WOMAN 2: Mei Ling, Duck Farmer and Attendant 1 the fourth time the Magistrate appears

WOMAN 3: Shu Fong, Paper Vendor and Attendant 2 the fourth time the Magistrate appears

WOMAN 4: Lotus, Matchmaker and Attendant 2 the first time the Magistrate appears

MAN 1: Father Cheng and Magistrate

MAN 2: Da Mu, Water Carrier and Attendant 2 the second and third times the Magistrate appears

MAN 3: Da Lin, Gem Dealer and Attendant 1 the first time the Magistrate appears

MAN 4: Da Sen, Cloth Vendor and Attendant 1 the second and third times the Magistrate appears

### LARGE CAST (12 or more performers):

If a large cast is desirable, assign each of the speaking parts to separate players.

Extra Villagers without speaking roles could be added, as well as children of the featured Villagers.

Two or more people could play Prop Persons, handing actors props and retrieving them as needed, in view of the audience, and helping with costume changes, where doubling is involved.

The Wind could be played by one performer, by several, or by a different actor at each appearance.

Musicians are preferably an onstage presence where they observe the action and accompany it. Their percussion and music may be combined with taped music if they cannot play melodic instruments.

## BACKGROUND

This script is based upon a Chinese story called “The Young Head of the Family.” It appeared in a book entitled *Chinese Nights’ Entertainment* by Adele M. Fielde, published by G. P. Putnam’s Sons of New York in 1893. The text of these stories was given as conversation among friends who each regaled one another with tales and their comments upon them from personal experience. In 1971, publisher Julian Messner of New York brought out a book for young readers by Robert Wyndham entitled *Tales the People Tell in China*; it included this story under the title “The Young Head of the Cheng Family.”

The four tales referred to by Precious Jade within this script have come from various sources. The tale of Yu Lan and of the Bodisattva may be found in Laurence Yep’s *Tongues of Jade*, (NY: Harper Collins, 1991), and *The Khan’s Daughter* in Laurence Yep’s book of that name, (NY: Scholastic Press, 1997). “Li Chi Slays the Serpent” is a well-known story readily found in several sources, one of which is *Sweet and Sour* edited by Carol Kendall and Yao-Wen Li, (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

Fellow theater artists, classical dancer Chiao Bin Huang and wushu master Bow Sim Mark, in Boston, thought a play based on the story of Precious Jade and other folktales would be an effective vehicle for introducing American youth to Chinese traditions practiced prior to the cultural and political revolutions of the twentieth century. They have each made many contributions to the development of this play.

In writing the script, I have combined my years of experience with Western theater style with my more recent encounters with Chinese theater styles acquired from work Ms. Huang and Ms.

Mark, from reading, watching videos, and attending live performances. I have also had the opportunity to spend a few weeks traveling in China, taking in urban and rural sites, historical sites and performances. My intent is to make this play blend theater styles from East and West. Directors are urged to have fun with it and to make use of the resource of artists in their area who can bring ideas and expertise that draws upon these two traditions. Although the play incorporates much music, neither Shu-Hui nor I have intended it to emulate the genre of Western musical theater.

## MUSIC

Shu-Hui Chen's original music gives melodic accompaniment for the songs. The intention is to also have percussive accompaniment underlie and punctuate action and to establish change of scene or passage of time. Traditional instruments for the melodic line would be pipa (a four-string lute-like instrument) and Chinese flute. Percussion instruments could include drums (single head, double head), wood block, clave's, gong, "trashy" cymbals, finger cymbals, bells and wind chimes. Because the script is a blend of Eastern and Western theater styles, the musical instruments could also be a mix from both cultures. Traditional Chinese theater underscores action with sound. The director is invited to experiment putting this concept into practice.

An ensemble of musicians makes it easier to rehearse and perform the accompaniment. However, it is possible to have one musician do all. In that case, use of an electronic keyboard that has simulated sounds of string, wind and percussion instruments might be an option. Or actors might play music when they are not in role—either working with a musician or handling it all themselves.

Taped music could be used to accompany or substitute live music. The melodic accompaniment, for instance, might be taped. However, percussive punctuation to action should be played live to assure accurate timing. Of course, it is desirable, whenever possible, to draw upon the expertise of musicians and musicologists who have skill in and knowledge about Chinese musical style.

If actors who can sing are not available, the director may coach the characters to speak the lyrics of the songs while the melody of the songs is played behind them, either live or on a CD.

## PERFORMANCE STYLE

Use formal stylized gesture and frontal focus as much as possible. Watching videos or live performances of Chinese opera will give the actors and director an introduction to this style of performance. If possible, arrange for coaching by persons skilled in Chinese theater, dance, music or wushu (Chinese martial arts).

Characters customarily bow to each other, from the waist, when greeting or taking leave. When in the presence of a person of higher rank, like a magistrate, the bow would be held.

Women look down and to the side, not directly at the person being addressed, if the person addressed is male or a woman of higher status. When a woman laughs, she holds her hand delicately in front of her face to hide her mouth. The theatrical walk for women would be to take small steps, rolling through the foot, and placing the heel of each progressing foot close to the toe of the foot behind.

## SCENERY

The action of this play moves freely between house interior, house exterior, roadway and open field. These locales should be established through action and change of music rather than through visual scenery.

A minimalist treatment of scenery is characteristic of traditional Chinese theater. The arrival of characters establishes a new place, and their exit clears the imaginary scenery. Stepping up over an imaginary, high threshold, for instance, indicates the doorway to a house when entering or exiting it.

A neutral or attractive backdrop or series of self-supported screens would be useful for aiding the actors' entrances and exits and costume changes. Tables or blocks on which to place props, costume pieces and musical instruments are also useful. The musical instruments should be placed and played in full view of the audience. A nice touch is to have a screen behind the musician(s) with the character for Music printed on it and a screen behind the area for the Cheng house with the character for Home printed on it. Directions for writing these characters and for the characters written during the play are in the appendix.

Four small stools or blocks will be needed for actors to sit on at "banquet," and one needs to be available to Father Cheng in the house interior scenes.

## PROPS

Mime as many of the props used as seems practical. There is no need to clutter the stage action with objects; however, the use of some props will be necessary for clarity and for visual interest



and color. A long piece of white or light gray silk is needed for the Wind; mounting it on a dowel greatly facilitates its manipulation. Long pieces of colored silk create a beautiful visual effect when manipulated by the characters in the laundry scene. A “flag” approximately 3’ x 3” with the design of a large wheel attached on top to a long dowel is the traditional way to depict a cart. It is carried by an attendant holding it at waist height on the downstage side of the actor who is to appear as though riding in the vehicle as he walks along.

## COSTUMES

Traditional costumes of Chinese theater or contemporary designs based upon traditional ones would be appropriate. Because the period of the story is more than a hundred years old, contemporary costumes would create misunderstanding. If an ensemble of actors doubles roles, actors could wear a unit outfit and don a simple costume piece for the different characters they represent. The donning might be done in full view of the audience, but to one side where the props are laid out for use. Or all design elements not in use might be hidden out of sight behind a screen or backdrop to keep the stage area clear of visual distractions.

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## PLOT SYNOPSIS

An arranged marriage of a young woman, Precious Jade, is brokered to help solve the problems of a floundering family in rural southern China, end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Precious Jade, a spirited girl, is determined to find a way to make life interesting and bearable in this highly structured society. Through her wits and recollection of advice and stories from a dearly loved grandmother, she is able to win over the members of her new family. Her final success lies in gaining the heart and support of her reluctant husband. And in the bargain she outsmarts a condescending Gem Dealer and an arrogant Magistrate.

The plot of this play is based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese story. The style of the script combines elements of traditional Chinese theater with Western theater. Perhaps the most noticeable custom from Chinese Opera is having characters introduce themselves in song when first appearing on stage or reappearing after a long absence. In addition to the songs of introduction there are ten other songs dealing with feelings, wishes and determinations. The lyrics of all may be sung or spoken—director's choice, depending on the skills of the performers. The use of percussion to underscore action is another tradition from Chinese Opera applied throughout. The somewhat didactic nature of the social message is also drawn from Chinese tradition but modified here for Western taste.

*(VILLAGERS resume their activity.)*

*GEM DEALER enters from opposite side. ALL freeze in their action during his song, oblivious to him.)*

**(#7: Gem Dealer's Introductory Song)**

GEM DEALER *(sings)*.

I'M A DEALER IN GEMS,  
 YIP MING DUR IS MY NAME.  
 I COME FROM NANJING  
 CULTURED CITY OF FAME.  
 I'M IN SEARCH OF OLD JEWELRY  
 OR UNPOLISHED STONES.  
 FIRST I BUY, THEN I SELL.  
 I TAKE CASH OR MAKE LOANS.  
 CHEATING FOLKS IS IN MY BONES.  
 COUNTRY PEASANTS ARE SO EASY TO FOOL.  
 THEY DON'T KNOW A ROUGH STONE  
 FROM A VALU'BLE JEWEL.

*(Speaks to VILLAGERS.)*

What village is this?

CLOTH VENDOR. We call it Tai Tong, place of contentment.

GEM DEALER. That's hard to believe. But, my good man, I've heard this area has interesting stones. Is that true?

CLOTH VENDOR. Farmers always complain of stones.

GEM DEALER. Where are they kept?

CLOTH VENDOR. Kept? They're tossed aside, I suppose.

GEM DEALER. Yes, of course. (*As an aside.*) Ignorant fools. (*To WOMEN.*) Does anyone here have old jewelry to sell?

PAPER VENDOR. Our only jewels are our children.

DUCK FARMER. They're not for sale! That is dirty business!

GEM DEALER. What's that?

PAPER VENDOR. Buying and selling children.

GEM DEALER (*conciliatory*). No, no, I'm looking for jewelry—or unpolished gems.

CLOTH VENDOR. Gems! I deal in cloth. (*Exits.*)

WATER CARRIER. There are no gems here. But I can sell you water—a copper wen for a dipper.

GEM DEALER. I've no need of that. (*Catches self and nods courteously.*) Thank you.

*(WATER CARRIER tries to exit through congestion created by PAPER VENDOR and DUCK FARMER. GEM DEALER notices.)*

GEM DEALER (*aside*). I've been told this area might contain precious stones. These villagers are not letting on.

*(PRECIOUS JADE bows politely to WATER CARRIER, turns him sideways with his yoke of buckets and gives a little nudge to move him through the obstructions.)*

WATER CARRIER. Thanks to you, Precious Jade.

(As WATER CARRIER exits, PRECIOUS JADE tucks the roll of paper she purchased into her belt and starts to run off with her kite.)

GEM DEALER. You there with the kite! Have you jewelry to sell?

PRECIOUS JADE. Jewelry to sell? I work on a farm with planting and watering. What an idea—jewelry to sell!

GEM DEALER. So you are a farmer. Are there interesting stones in your field?

PRECIOUS JADE. Why do you ask?

GEM DEALER. I sometimes collect them...for my young nephews.

PRECIOUS JADE. Do they have value?

GEM DEALER. No, no real value. Collecting...is a pastime of ours.

PRECIOUS JADE. Any stones you'd find there are not mine to sell. I work the field for my husband's family.

GEM DEALER. Do they know you fly kites there instead?

PRECIOUS JADE. I play with my kite on my way to the fields, but I work once I'm there.

GEM DEALER. Always looking to play games?

PRECIOUS JADE. When we harvest rice, it's fun tossing grain for the wind to take its chaff. I play with the wind, sir, but with my feet on the ground.

GEM DEALER. You're a foolish girl. Be off with you.

PRECIOUS JADE (to GEM DEALER). I'm glad to be gone. I have lots to do. (Remarks to self.) It was you who stopped me as I passed through. (Exits.)

*(VILLAGERS drift off. GEM DEALER moves along as though down the road. MAGISTRATE enters again with ATTENDANT. GEM DEALER is standing in the way.)*

ATTENDANT. Make way! Make way! Clear the way.

*(Pushes GEM DEALER with staff.)*

GEM DEALER *(turns his back defiantly)*. The road is wide. Move around me.

MAGISTRATE. Who is that man?

ATTENDANT. Present yourself.

GEM DEALER. Yip Ming Dur, from Nanjing. I'm here to do business.

MAGISTRATE. There'll be no business for you till you're punished for insolence.

GEM DEALER. I've made a mistake, honored sir. Now I see your importance.

MAGISTRATE. Magistrate of this district.

GEM DEALER. My apologies, sir. I am a stranger.

MAGISTRATE. That's no excuse. See my hat! Anyone can tell my office from my hat.

GEM DEALER. I beg your forgiveness.

MAGISTRATE. You'll get your pardon from my cane. *(To ATTENDANT.)* Beat him soundly.

*(ATTENDANT mimes caning GEM DEALER—PERCUSSION accompanies a few sharp blows—as MAGISTRATE talks.)*

MAGISTRATE. Ignorance is no excuse for insolence. Rules of good behavior are the same for all China. Enough. Don't show your face here again!

(*MAGISTRATE and ATTENDANT exit.*)

**(#8: “What a Dreadful Village”)**

GEM DEALER (*sings*).

WHAT A DREADFUL VILLAGE, TAI TONG!  
I LEAVE IT GLADLY TODAY.  
BUT I’VE NOT GOTTEN WHAT I WANT HERE,  
SO YOU WILL SEE, I’LL BE BACK AND  
I’LL FIND HOW TO MAKE MY SEARCHES PAY.

(*Exits. GONG.*)

(*ACTOR enters with wind silk. PRECIOUS JADE follows the WIND with her kite and plays with it a minute. WIND exits.*)

PRECIOUS JADE. Oh, Grandmother, I’m so lonely. Is my kite now the only thing to bring me joy? My kite and the memory of your face and words! (*Carefully lays down kite to one side. Starts to lay down roll of paper and pauses to reflect.*) I treasure the many stories and words of advice you gave me. I wish I could write them down...to keep them all for my grandchildren. Dare I ask my husband to teach me... (*Mimes writing characters vertically on the air.*) ...to make beautiful characters...to put down your words, Grandmother...and my thoughts. And learn to read other’s writings, too! But this melon patch needs watering. (*Lays down paper with kite, picks up a bucket set there by PROP PERSON and mimes filling it with water from the stream and watering plants.*)



*(MAGISTRATE enters with ATTENDANT.)*

MAGISTRATE. Stop here. I am thirsty from the hot sun.

ATTENDANT. We have traveled far checking on the business of your district.

MAGISTRATE. Ask that peasant to draw me water from the stream.

ATTENDANT *(approaching PRECIOUS JADE)*. Our worthy magistrate wishes fresh water to drink.

PRECIOUS JADE. You do me honor. I'll fetch it immediately. *(Mimes quickly emptying bucket on the plants and runs to stream to mime refilling bucket with water.)* Let me pour it into this earthen jar so he may drink with ease. *(Takes earthen container from PROP PERSON and mimes filling it with water, then approaches cart.)*

MAGISTRATE. Stop! I do not want her near.

ATTENDANT. Do not approach.

MAGISTRATE. Her hands and jar are dirty. Her hair is loose. Her feet unbound.

ATTENDANT. Pour your water into the magistrate's china bowl, and I will bring it to him.

*(Takes bowl from PROP PERSON and holds it out to PRECIOUS JADE who mimes filling it from earthen jar. ATTENDANT presents it to MAGISTRATE. GEM DEALER enters and watches unnoticed from one side.)*

MAGISTRATE. The sun is hot. I brought no fan. Ask the peasant for one.

ATTENDANT. Do you have a fan for the magistrate?

PRECIOUS JADE. Excuse me. I do not.

ATTENDANT. What's that paper lying there?

PRECIOUS JADE. Just my kite and...

MAGISTRATE. Hand it here.

*(PRECIOUS JADE picks up kite, hands it to ATTENDANT, who gives it to MAGISTRATE.)*

MAGISTRATE. I'll make do with this. *(Reads calligraphy on kite.)* "Fly High"! No more. *(MAGISTRATE rips paper from frame or pulls off tail and fans self with folded paper.)* Be on our way!

*(PRECIOUS JADE stands respectfully with bowed head. MAGISTRATE and ATTENDANT exit.)*

PRECIOUS JADE. My kite destroyed! My feet scorned. Of course they are unbound. How could I work a farm on tiny feet made crippled and useless?

GEM DEALER *(laughs, catching PRECIOUS JADE's attention)*. I see the magistrate does not treat the people of this district any better than he does a stranger. Now at least you have no kite to distract you from your work! *(Exits.)*

PRECIOUS JADE. Humiliated! Insulted by that stranger and by the magistrate himself. It brings shame to our family. I am so sorry, Grandmother. *(Shakes head in despair.)* My own brothers and their wives have already forgotten me. They married me into a family where no one notices or cares for me. Precious Jade? I'm precious to no one. *(Picks up pieces of ruined kite in despair. BELL. PRECIOUS JADE stops and straightens.)* Yes, Grandmother, I hear you. "Strive to become worthy of

respect.” I will—for you and my family—and for myself. Respect—even from a magistrate!

**(#9: “I Must Be Strong”)**

PRECIOUS JADE (*sings*).

I MUST BE STRONG  
 TO WIN RESPECT,  
 AND TO BRING HONOR TO THE FAMILY LIANG.  
 I MUST BE STRONG  
 TO WIN RESPECT  
 FOR YOU, DEAR HONORABLE GRANDMOTHER,  
 TO REPAY YOUR LOVE,  
 TO MAKE YOU PROUD OF ME,  
 SO YOU MAY HOLD YOUR HEAD UP HIGH  
 AMONG THE SPIRITS OF OUR ANCESTORS.

*(PRECIOUS JADE picks up her bucket and returns to watering. ACTOR with wind silk runs through blowing in two young women, MEI LING and SHU FONG. WIND exits. They do not notice PRECIOUS JADE almost dancing as she works. They sit and begin wailing. PRECIOUS JADE hears their cries, stops, looks for the source and approaches MEI LING and SHU FONG.)*

PRECIOUS JADE. Young ladies, why are you crying? Oh, Mei Ling and Shu Fong! My new sisters-in-law! I did not recognize you in your distress.

MEI LING. Precious Jade, it is you! Yes, I am miserable.

SHU FONG. And I, Shu Fong, soon will be dishonored.

PRECIOUS JADE. What is the trouble?

**(#10: “We Are Heartsick” - duet)**

MEI LING (*sings*).

WE ARE HEARTSICK.

SHU FONG (*sings*).

WE ARE IN TROUBLE.

MEI LING (*sings*).

WE ARE TREMBLING.

MEI LING & SHU FONG (*sing*).

THERE IS NO HOPE FOR US.

SHU FONG (*sings*).

WE WILL BE PUNISHED.

MEI LING (*sings*).

WE WILL BE BEATEN.

SHU FONG (*sings*).

WE’LL BE DISGRACED.

MEI LING & SHU FONG (*sing*).

FOR NOT DOING WHAT WE PROMISED.

PRECIOUS JADE. Calm yourselves. What have you promised that you cannot do? And why are you on this road-way?

*(MEI LING and SHU FONG look up and notice audience, stand, bow and quickly introduce selves and then continue their tale with whining, sobbing and wailing.)*

MEI LING *(to audience)*. Pardon me. I am Mei Ling, wife to Cheng Da Mu, Son Number One of the Family Cheng.

SHU FONG *(to audience)*. And I Shu Fong, wife to Cheng Da Lin, Son Number Two of the Family Cheng. *(Back to PRECIOUS JADE.)* We wished to visit our families...

MEI LING. Shu Fong hers...

SHU FONG. ...and Mei Ling hers. We love them dearly...

MEI LING. ...but since we each married into the Family Cheng...

SHU FONG. ...we cannot see them more than once in a year.

MEI LING. Mr. Cheng, our husbands' father, is very stern.

SHU FONG. We are not worthy in his eyes.

MEI LING. We are not used to doing farmwork.

SHU FONG. We cannot manage the household to his liking.

MEI LING. He has no heart for us.

SHU FONG. We are so homesick.

*(Crescendo of cries.)*

MEI LING. Even our husbands pleaded...

SHU FONG. ...for us to be allowed an extra visit.

MEI LING. Finally he said yes...

SHU FONG. ...with two conditions.

MEI LING *(BELL sounds)*. That on return I bring him wind in paper!

SHU FONG (*BELL sounds*). And I must carry to him fire wrapped in paper!

MEI LING. We said yes. We were so eager to be gone.

SHU FONG. How can we keep such a promise?

MEI LING. Our families will disown us.

SHU FONG. We can't go forward.

MEI LING. We can't go back.

*(Maximum crescendo of cries.)*

PRECIOUS JADE. Sisters-in-law, do not despair. There must be an answer to this riddle he gave you. Be calm and it will come. (*Picks up remains of her kite and thoughtfully moves it.*)

MEI LING. He posed it to trick us...

SHU FONG. ...so we'd never return.

PRECIOUS JADE. I've played with wind with my kite.

MEI LING. Your kite's the solution! May we borrow it?

PRECIOUS JADE. I no longer have it. The magistrate destroyed it. (*Shows the remnants.*)

MEI LING & SHU FONG. Oh!

PRECIOUS JADE. The riddle says bring wind, not ride on it.

SHU FONG. A kite is no solution.

PRECIOUS JADE. Perhaps the magistrate solved your riddle with the thoughtless way he used it.

MEI LING. How?

PRECIOUS JADE (*gesturing with hands*).

Wind fills a ship's sail

And lifts up a kite.

We can bring it to us

On paper that's light.

MEI LING. Of course! A paper fan will carry wind. Oh, thank you. (*Whirls around in delight.*) I have the answer. Let us go quickly.

SHU FONG. What about me? Paper and fire? Shall I burn to a cinder? (*Continues to sob.*)

PRECIOUS JADE. My grandmother would say, "Go inside and listen."

MEI LING. But we're on a roadway...

SHU FONG. ...with no shelter near!

PRECIOUS JADE. Inside yourself...to quiet where you can think.

MEI LING (*holding her hands over ears*). I hear only a rushing in my ears.

SHU FONG. I cannot stop crying long enough to listen.

MEI LING. We've spent so much time weeping we won't reach our village by dark. And we brought no lantern to light our way.

PRECIOUS JADE.

Fire burns paper.

It also gives light.

How can we hold it

To help us at night?

SHU FONG. In a paper lantern! Oh, thank you, Precious Jade. Now we can do it.

MEI LING. If we hurry, we'll arrive before dark.

PRECIOUS JADE. Go. Enjoy your families.

MEI LING & SHU FONG. Thank you. Thank you, Precious Jade.

PRECIOUS JADE. Farewell!