



DRAMATIZED READINGS.

The Magic Brocade

A Tale of China

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NARRATOR 1: Once in China there lived an old widow and her son, Chen. The widow was known all over for the brocades that she made on her loom.

NARRATOR 4: Weaving threads of silver, gold, and colored silk into her cloth, she made pictures of flowers, birds, and animals—

NARRATOR 2: pictures so real they seemed almost alive.

NARRATOR 3: People said there were no brocades finer than the ones the widow wove.



NARRATOR 1: One day, the widow took a pile of brocades to the marketplace, where she quickly sold them. Then she went about buying her household needs.

NARRATOR 4: All at once she stopped.

WIDOW: Oh, my!

NARRATOR 2: Her eye had been caught by a beautiful painted scroll that hung in one of the stalls.

NARRATOR 3: It showed a marvelous palace, all red and yellow and blue and green, reaching delicately to the sky. All around were fantastic gardens, and walking through them, the loveliest maidens.

NARRATOR 1: The stall keeper asked,

STALL KEEPER: Do you like it? It's a painting of Sun Palace. They say it lies far to the east and is the home of many fairy ladies.

WIDOW: *(sighs)* It's wonderful. It makes me want to be there. *(pays and takes it)*

NARRATOR 4: Though it cost most of her money, the widow could not resist buying the scroll.

NARRATOR 2: When she got back to her cottage, she showed it to her son.

WIDOW: Look, Chen. Have you ever seen anything more beautiful? How I would love to live in that palace, or at least visit it!

NARRATOR 3: Chen looked at her thoughtfully.

CHEN: Mother, why don't you weave the picture as a brocade? That would be almost like being there.

WIDOW: Why, Chen, what a marvelous idea! I'll start at once.



NARRATOR 1: She set up her loom and began to weave.

NARRATOR 4: She worked for hours, then days, then weeks, barely stopping to eat or sleep. Her eyes grew bloodshot, and her fingers raw.

CHEN: (*anxiously*) Mother, shouldn't you get more rest?

WIDOW: Oh, Chen, it's so hard to stop. While I weave, I feel like I'm there at Sun Palace. And I don't want to come away!

NARRATOR 2: Because the widow no longer wove brocades to sell, Chen cut firewood and sold that instead.

NARRATOR 3: Months went by, while inch by inch the pattern appeared on the loom.

NARRATOR 1: One day, Chen came in to find the loom empty and the widow sobbing.

CHEN: (*in alarm*) What's wrong, Mother?

NARRATOR 4: She looked at him tearfully.

WIDOW: (*plaintively*) I finished it.

NARRATOR 2: The brocade was laid out on the floor. And there it all was—the palace reaching to the sky, the beautiful gardens, the lovely fairy ladies.

CHEN: (*in amazement*) It looks so real. I feel like I could step into it!

NARRATOR 3: Just then, a sudden wind whipped through the cottage. It lifted the brocade, blew it out the window, and carried it through the air.

NARRATOR 1: The widow and her son rushed outside, only to watch the brocade disappear into the east.

WIDOW: It's gone!

NARRATOR 4: And the widow fainted away.



NARRATOR 2: Chen carried her to her bed and sat beside her for many hours.

NARRATOR 3: At last her eyes opened.

WIDOW: (*weakly*) Chen, you must find the brocade and bring it back. I cannot live without it.

CHEN: Don't worry, Mother. I'll go at once.

NARRATOR 1: Chen gathered a few things and started to the east.

NARRATOR 4: He walked for hours, then days, then weeks. But there was no sign of the brocade.

NARRATOR 2: One day, Chen came upon a lonely hut.

NARRATOR 3: Sitting by the door was an old, leather-skinned woman smoking a pipe. A horse was grazing nearby.

OLD WOMAN: Hello, deary. What brings you so far from home?

CHEN: I'm looking for my mother's brocade. The wind carried it to the east.

OLD WOMAN: Ah, yes. The brocade of Sun Palace! Well, that wind was sent by the fairy ladies of the palace itself. They're using the brocade as a pattern for their weaving.

CHEN: But my mother will die without it!

OLD WOMAN: Well, then, you had best get it back! But you won't get to Sun Palace by foot, so you'd better ride my horse. It will show you the way.

CHEN: Thank you!

OLD WOMAN: Oh, don't thank me yet, deary. Between here and there, you must pass through the flames of Fiery Mountain. If you make a single sound of complaint, you'll be burnt to ashes. After that, you must cross the Icy Sea. The



smallest word of discontent, and you'll be frozen solid. (*with a hard look*) Do you still want to go?

CHEN: (*daunted yet determined*) I must get back my mother's brocade.

OLD WOMAN: (*approvingly*) Good boy. Take the horse and go.

NARRATOR 1: Chen climbed on, and the horse broke into a gallop. Before long they came to a mountain all on fire.

NARRATOR 4: Without missing a step, the horse started up the slope, leaping through the flames.

NARRATOR 2: Chen felt the fire singe his skin, but he bit his lip and made not a sound.

NARRATOR 3: At last they came down the other side. When they'd left the flames behind, Chen was surprised to find that his burns were gone.

NARRATOR 1: A little later, they came to a sea filled with great chunks of ice.

NARRATOR 4: Without pausing a moment, the horse began leaping from one ice floe to another.

NARRATOR 2: Waves showered them with icy spray, so that Chen was soaked and shivering. But he held his tongue and said not a word.

NARRATOR 3: Finally they reached the far shore. At once, Chen felt himself dry and warm.

NARRATOR 1: It wasn't long then till they came to Sun Palace. It looked just like his mother's brocade!

NARRATOR 4: He rode to the entrance, sprang from the horse, and hurried into a huge hall.

NARRATOR 2: Sitting there at looms were dozens of fairy ladies, who turned to stare at him, then whispered to each



other excitedly. On each loom was a copy of his mother's brocade, and the brocade itself hung in the center of the room.

NARRATOR 3: A lady near the door rose from her loom to meet him.

LI-EN: (*graciously*) My name is Li-en, and I welcome you. You are the first mortal ever to reach our palace. What good fortune brings you here?

NARRATOR 1: The fairy was so beautiful that for a moment Chen could only stare.

NARRATOR 4: Li-en gazed shyly downward.

CHEN: Dear lady, I have come for my mother's brocade.

LI-EN: (*looks up at him in delight*) So you are the widow's son! How we admire that brocade! None of us has been able to match it. We wish to keep it here till we can.

CHEN: But I must bring it home, or my mother will die!

NARRATOR 2: Li-en looked alarmed, and a flurry of whispers arose in the room.

NARRATOR 3: She stepped away to speak softly with several others, then returned to Chen.

LI-EN: We surely must not let that happen to her. Only let us keep the brocade for the rest of the day, so we can try to finish our own. Tomorrow you may take it back with you.

CHEN: (*joyfully*) Thank you, dear lady!

NARRATOR 1: The fairies worked busily to finish their brocades. Chen sat near Li-en at her loom.

NARRATOR 4: As she wove, he told her about his life in the human world, and she told him about hers at Sun Palace. Many smiles and glances passed between them.



NARRATOR 2: When darkness fell, the fairies worked on by the light of a magic pearl.

NARRATOR 3: At last Chen's eyes would stay open no longer, and he drifted to sleep on his chair.

NARRATOR 1: One by one the fairies finished or left off, and went out of the hall.

NARRATOR 4: Li-en was the last one there, and it was almost dawn when she was done. She cut her brocade from the loom and held it beside the widow's.

LI-EN: (*sighs*) Mine is good, but the widow's is still better. If only she could come and teach us herself.

NARRATOR 2: Then Li-en had an idea. With needle and thread, she embroidered a small image onto the widow's brocade—an image of herself on the palace steps.

NARRATOR 3: She softly said a spell. Then she left the hall, with a last long smiling gaze at Chen.

NARRATOR 1: When Chen awoke, the sun was just rising. He looked around the hall for Li-en, but saw no one. Though he longed to find her to say good-bye, he told himself,

CHEN: I must not waste a moment.

NARRATOR 4: He rolled up his mother's brocade, rushed from the hall, and jumped onto the horse.

NARRATOR 2: Back he raced, across the Icy Sea,

NARRATOR 3: and over Fiery Mountain.

NARRATOR 1: When he reached the old woman's hut, she was standing there waiting for him.

OLD WOMAN: Hurry, Chen! Your mother is dying! Put on these shoes, or you'll never get there in time.

NARRATOR 4: Chen put them on.



NARRATOR 2: One step, two, three, then he was racing over the countryside faster than he could believe possible.

NARRATOR 3: In no time, he was home.

NARRATOR 1: He rushed into the cottage and found the widow in bed, pale and quiet.

CHEN: (*in alarm*) Mother!

NARRATOR 4: Her eyes opened slowly.

WIDOW: (*weakly*) Chen?

CHEN: Mother, I brought it.

NARRATOR 2: He unrolled the cloth onto the bed.

WIDOW: My brocade!

NARRATOR 3: The widow raised herself to look. Color came back to her face, and she seemed already stronger.

WIDOW: Chen, I need more light. Let's take it outside.

NARRATOR 1: He helped her out of the cottage and placed the brocade on a rock.

NARRATOR 4: But just then a sudden wind came, and the brocade rose slowly in the air.

NARRATOR 2: It stretched as it rose, growing larger and larger, till it filled their view completely.

NARRATOR 3: The palace was as large as Chen himself had seen it, and standing on the steps was the fairy lady Li-en.

LI-EN: (*beckoning with her hand*) Quickly! While the wind still blows! Step into the brocade!

NARRATOR 1: For a moment, Chen was too astounded to move. Then he took hold of his mother's arm, and together they stepped forward.



NARRATOR 4: There was a shimmering, and there they stood before Sun Palace.

NARRATOR 2: Li-en rushed up to them, and the other fairies gathered around. She said to the widow,

LI-EN: Welcome, honored one. If it pleases you, we wish you to live with us and teach us the secrets of your craft.

WIDOW: *(in amazed delight)* Nothing could please me more! But, Chen, is it all right with you?

NARRATOR 3: Chen looked in Li-en's eyes and smiled.

CHEN: Yes, Mother, it's just fine with me.

NARRATOR 1: So the widow became teacher to the fairies,

NARRATOR 4: and Chen became husband to Li-en.

NARRATOR 2: And people say there are no brocades finer

NARRATOR 3: than the ones they weave at Sun Palace.