

THE TALE OF THE GIFTED PRINCE

Book & Lyrics
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Music
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Inspired by *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* by Lloyd Alexander
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Working Script – 15 April 2026

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

WOMAN – our Storyteller: a mysterious entity who assumes the guises of various masters, madams, and denizens of Tang.

LING – a painter: strong, idealistic, fearless.

FALCONER – a loyalist of the King in the north of Tang: forthright, intelligent, warm.

LAN – the Falconer's young daughter: resilient, timid, loving.

KING TAI – the King of Tang: seasoned, distinguished, yet mentally failing. [Also plays VILLAGE OFFICIAL, MAGISTRATE, LAO HU]

KUANG – the General of the Royal Guard, King Tai's right hand: courageous, loyal, confident, determined, vain.

PRINCE REN – the Young Lord Prince of Tang: enthusiastic, tenacious, honorable, adventurous.

NA TA – a revolutionary: focused, malevolent, violent, devious.

FENG – Na Ta's right-hand man: spineless, simple, terrified of Na Ta.

VILLAGE OFFICIAL – a corrupt bureaucrat: obsequious, opportunistic, licentious.

ZHI HAO – a servant: courageous, high-spirited, plucky, loyal.

MO SHA – an honest thief: devoted, childlike, affirmative, educated.

MAGISTRATE – law enforcer of Tang: pompous, arrogant, bombastic.

LAO HU – a tiger, the fighting spirit of the People: preening, exhibitionist, adept.

ENSEMBLE – ATTENDANTS, GUARDS, VILLAGERS, YELLOW SCARVES, etc.

SETTING

A fictional kingdom in medieval China.

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CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Tale of the Gifted Prince is a new family-friendly musical inspired by Chinese folklore and based on the award-winning novel *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* by American fantasy/adventure writer Lloyd Alexander. This creative endeavor begins in Western musical theatre, features a diverse North American Asian cast, and embraces theatrical conventions and practices from around the globe, including China, where our fable is set. We hope to delight audiences as we, and our characters, imagine Chinese places, cultures, customs, and values – from long ago and today, through fact and fiction – to inspire individual empathy and communal understanding.

ACT ONE

Prologue: THEATRE

(#00) PROLOGUE

(A WOMAN appears in a spotlight holding a book. A breath.)

WOMAN

This is an ancient tale.

THAT COMES ACROSS THE OCEAN
ON THE WINDS THAT FLY FROM EAST TO WEST.

(A gust of wind. ENSEMBLE is ghosted in light.)

AND ALL THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED UPON THESE PAGES
ARE THE ONES WHO TELL THE STORY BEST:

An aging monarch...

(KING TAI steps forward.)

TOO OLD AND BLIND TO SEE
CORRUPT OFFICIALS STEALING FROM THE PEASANTRY.

(A CORRUPT OFFICIAL steps forward.)

AND SO THE POOR AND SICK

(VILLAGERS step forward. The CORRUPT OFFICIAL takes their possessions.)

HAVE SUFFERED EVER SINCE.
AND ALL OF THIS KEPT FROM THE KING

By a general...

(General LI KUANG steps forward.)

WHOSE DUTY AND DEVOTION
ONLY HELPED TO SET THE WHEELS IN MOTION
FOR THIS "TALE OF THE GIFTED PRINCE."

*(PRINCE REN steps forward. KING TAI coughs and stumbles off.
PRINCE REN and KUANG remain.)*

KUANG

THE KING IS GROWING WEAKER,
A FACT I HAVE TO FACE.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PRINCE REN
IS FORCED TO TAKE HIS PLACE?

HE'S YOUNG AND SPOILED.
I'D RATHER TURN TO STONE
THAN WATCH THE KINGDOM FALL
WHEN HE SITS ON THE THRONE.

(PRINCE REN and KUANG exit. LING enters with a painting.)

WOMAN

In a small village, Ling, an artist, attempts to use art to speak truth to those who will understand.

LING

THESE REBELS ARRIVED AND THEY RALLIED THE TOWN.
THEY SPOKE OF REVENGE AND THEY THREATENED THE CROWN.
I'VE PAINTED THIS SCENE TO DEPICT WHAT THE OTHERS CAN'T SEE:
THAT THOSE YELLOW SCARVES AREN'T WHO THEY CLAIM TO BE.

(As LING exits, she hands her painting to a FALCONER, who enters with her daughter, LAN.)

WOMAN

In the farthest northern region by the River Miao, a Falconer interprets Ling's message—

(FALCONER whistles)

FALCONER

(urgently, to the FALCON)

For General Kuang. Quickly. Go!

(to LAN)

HELLO, PRETTY BIRD,
TELL ME WHERE YOU FLY.

LAN

OVER THE MOUNTAINS AND INTO THE SKY.

(LAN exits, pretending to fly. The FALCONER follows LAN off. The WOMAN holds out her hand and attracts the FALCON who drops the message and flies off.)

WOMAN

AND SO THIS MESSAGE,
SUCH AN IMPORTANT THING,
IF LEFT WITH KUANG
WOULD NEVER MAKE IT TO THE KING.

(reading the note)

*"There's discord in the land
And fighting from within."*

(to the audience)

HOW WILL THE KING REACT WHEN FACED WITH REAL DANGER?
WILL HE HEED THIS WARNING FROM A STRANGER?
SEEMS IT'S TIME OUR JOURNEY SHOULD BEGIN!

(The WOMAN exits with the book as the scene transitions to...)

Scene 1: CELESTIAL PALACE

(ATTENDANTS bustle around the Courtyard)

(#01) IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG

**[Attendants, Prince Ren, Guards,
Woman, Kuang, King Tai]**

ATTENDANTS

AHHH...

PERFECT SKY,

PERFECT DAY,

PERFECT LIFE IN EVERY WAY.

EVERY YEAR WE WATCH THE SEASONS TURNING.

(PRINCE REN enters reading the Book of Royal Obligations.)

PRINCE REN

AS THE PRINCE,

NO SURPRISE,

ALL I DO IS MEMORIZE.

WHEN CAN I APPLY ALL THAT I'M LEARNING?

I WOKE UP JUST THIS MORNING,

AND WITHOUT WARNING,

I FELT THERE'S MORE THAT I COULD BE.

IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME?

ATTENDANTS

PERFECT DAY IN EVERY WAY...

PRINCE REN

(reading)

"Royal Obligation Number Seventy-Eight: Be calm in the face of danger."

Got it! "Number Seventy-Nine: Be open to learning from any source regardless of status." I can do that! "Number Eighty..."

(The WOMAN approaches the GUARDS.)

GUARD #1

What do you think you're doing?

WOMAN

I—

GUARD #2

Peasant women have no business here. Move on!

WOMAN

But—

GUARD #1

(laughing at her)

Go on! Go back to your weaving!

(The WOMAN freezes the action with a wave of her hand.)

WOMAN

(deep breath)

It seems, for this story to continue, some alterations are necessary.

(The WOMAN assumes the guise of MASTER WU.)

There!

(The WOMAN waves her hand and the action continues. PRINCE REN looks up from his book to watch the following:)

GUARD #1

STATE YOUR NAME.

WOMAN

MASTER WU.

GUARD #2

STATE YOUR PURPOSE.

WOMAN

TO BRING YOU URGENT NEWS OF DANGER IN THE LAND.

GUARD #1

DANGER?

WOMAN

YES.

GUARD #1

GO RIGHT THROUGH.

WOMAN

(to audience)

See what a disguise can do?

GUARD #2

TAKE IT STRAIGHT TO KUANG

WOMAN

I UNDERSTAND.

(The WOMAN passes through the gate.)

PRINCE REN

A MESSAGE FROM A STRANGER ABOUT SOME DANGER.

I NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

BEFORE THE STRANGER'S GONE.

*(PRINCE REN passes through the gate. Scene shifts to the Throne Room.
ATTENDANTS enter.)*

ATTENDANTS

IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG, LIFE IS PERFECTION.

IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG, OUR LIFE'S A CHARM.

UP TO NOW WE HAVE HAD THE KING'S PROTECTION,

AND OUR LOYALTY HAS KEPT US FREE FROM HARM.

BUT OF LATE THE KING HAS GROWN TOO OLD AND FEEBLE

AND THE PALACE FEELS A LITTLE LESS SECURE.

SUPPOSE A CRISIS HAPPENED, WOULD WE SOMEHOW ALL ENDURE?

ATTENDANTS

IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG...

IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG...

PRINCE REN

THE STRANGER'S MESSAGE SEEMS TO BE

A NOTE OF UTMOST URGENCY.

(KING TAI enters and sits on his throne with KUANG by his side.)

ATTENDANTS

ALL HAIL, ALL HAIL,

HANDS TO THE SKY.

ALL HAIL, ALL HAIL,

OUR RULER, THE GREAT KING TAI...

(A GUARD enters.)

GUARD #1

Your Majesty, there is a Master Wu outside with a message of utmost urgency.

KING TAI

Bring him in.

(The GUARD exits. KUANG suddenly becomes anxious.)

KUANG

Honorable King Tai, allow me to deal with this.

KING TAI

Nonsense. It is a Royal Obligation for the King to hear the petitions of his subjects.

(The WOMAN enters.)

WOMAN

(bowing)

Your Majesty.

KING TAI

Rise.

(PRINCE REN enters and trips. KING TAI turns to the WOMAN.)

Your attendant, I presume?

PRINCE REN

(recovering)

Father?! It's me.

(stepping closer)

Ren...

KUANG

(whispering)

Your son.

KING TAI

Ren? Oh, yes... yes. Of course.

(looking around)

Where is your mother?

PRINCE REN

Mother?

KUANG

(whispering)

Deceased, Your Majesty.

KING TAI

(vaguely)

Oh. Ah. Yes.

PRINCE REN

An illness. Remember?

KING TAI

An illness? Yes, yes, I know this. Of course.

(PRINCE REN displaces KUANG from the side of KING TAI.)

PRINCE REN

I was studying the Book of Royal Obligations, when I saw this stranger headed towards the throne room---

KING TAI

(to WOMAN)

What is your news?

WOMAN

(passing the message to the GUARD)

Your Majesty, I have received alarming word of a disturbance in the northern province. A small town attacked, peasants recruited, statues toppled, and on every official building, a streak of yellow.

PRINCE REN

In Tang? That's impossible. Our Kingdom is the sphere of heavenly perfection. Right, Father?

KING TAI

Heavenly perfection. Yes.

(KING TAI looks distressed.)

PRINCE REN

Father? Are you all right?

KING TAI

(handing the message to KUANG)

Could they be back?

PRINCE REN

Who are “they”?

KING TAI

The Yellow Scarves.

PRINCE REN

Yellow Scarves?

KING TAI

A DANGEROUS ALLIANCE
FILLED WITH DEFIANCE
TOWARDS THE KINGDOM AND THE CROWN –
THEY MUST BE TAKEN DOWN.

KUANG

IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG,
AN INSURRECTION.
IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG,
A VICIOUS PLOY
THAT AT ONE TIME IMPERILED OUR PERFECTION
WITH A PLOT TO OVERTHROW AND THEN DESTROY.
BUT THE LEADER OF THE YELLOW SCARVES WAS CAPTURED
WHILE HIS FOLLOWERS WERE NEVER CAUGHT OR KNOWN.
BEFORE HE DIED I HEARD HIM SAY HIS SON WOULD CLAIM THE THRONE...
IN THE KINGDOM OF TANG.

PRINCE REN

His son?

KING TAI

His name is Na Ta.

WOMAN

As the new leader of the Yellow Scarves, Na Ta is growing more popular every day.

KING TAI

Prepare my horse! Where is my sword? Bring me my sword!

(KING TAI falters.)

KUANG

Your Majesty, in your condition, such a journey would be inadvisable. Let me go in your stead. I will eliminate this threat.

WOMAN

Forgive me for speaking out of turn, but in a situation such as this, what does the Book of Royal Obligations demand?

(All eyes on PRINCE REN.)

PRINCE REN

I know this. According to the Book of Royal Obligations... "When the King is unable to fulfill his duties...

(slowly begins to dawn on him)

... the Prince must assume His Majesty's place."

KUANG

But the Prince isn't ready.

PRINCE REN

I am.

KUANG

Your Majesty, the Prince has never put on his own clothes or even washed his own feet. He knows nothing of how to deal with real danger.

PRINCE REN

I know plenty. Father--

KING TAI

General Kuang is right. You are not ready to defend the Kingdom.

(#01A) SAVE THE DAY

[Prince Ren, Attendants, Kuang, King Tai]

PRINCE REN

But--

KING TAI

Do you wish to disobey me?

PRINCE REN

I wish to prove to you that I am capable of ruling Tang!

ONCE UPON A TIME, WHEN YOU WERE STILL YOUNG.

DIDN'T YOU BELIEVE IN TANG'S PERFECTION?

EVEN WHEN BETRAYED BY INSURRECTION,

YOU HAD FAITH THIS KINGDOM WAS STILL GREAT.

JUST BEYOND THESE WALLS YOUR SUBJECTS ARE SCARED.

YOU WOULD NEVER LET THEM BE FORSAKEN.

NA TA THINKS YOU'RE WEAK, BUT HE'S MISTAKEN.

LET ME GO BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

I CAN SAVE THE DAY.

I CAN REPRESENT THE CROWN.

FATHER, I WON'T LET YOU DOWN.

I SHOULD START WITHOUT DELAY.

YES, I CAN SAVE THE DAY.

I'LL BE FAIR, AND I'LL BE JUST.

LET ME GO AND EARN YOUR TRUST.

LET ME HEAR YOU SAY

I CAN SAVE THE DAY.

KING TAI

Enough! We will speak no more of this.

PRINCE REN

I WAS TAUGHT TO FIGHT FOR WHAT I BELIEVE.

I CAN STAND MY GROUND AND NEVER WAVER.

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS? YES, I CAN SAVE HER!

WHEN THAT MOMENT COMES, I WON'T BE WEAK.

PRINCE REN

IN NO TIME AT ALL,
WHAT'S BAD COULD GET WORSE.
SO I RECOMMEND RESTORING ORDER.
I WOULD JOURNEY 'TIL I CROSS THE BORDER
JUST TO FIND THIS REBEL THAT WE SEEK.

ATTENDANTS

THAT'S TRUE!
WHAT CAN WE DO?

KING TAI

Absolutely not.

PRINCE REN

I CAN SAVE THE DAY
I AM CERTAIN I'LL SUCCEED.
I WAS BORN AND BRED TO LEAD.
I WILL BE OKAY!

KUANG

HE WON'T LAST A SINGLE DAY!

PRINCE REN

I CAN SAVE THE DAY.

KING TAI

Your studies are not complete.

PRINCE REN

But I've been preparing for as long as I can remember.
(reading from the Book)

HE WHO LEARNS BUT DOES NOT ACT IS LOST.

KING TAI

HE WHO ACTS BUT HASN'T LEARNED IS IN GREAT DANGER.

PRINCE REN

BUT HOW CAN I IGNORE THIS VOICE THAT'S TELLING ME TO FLY?
I HAVE TO TRY.
SINCE DEEP INSIDE YOU KNOW THAT I'D FULFILL MY DESTINY.

PRINCE REN

I'M REN, YOUR SON, PRINCE REN.
SO WHEN YOU...
LET ME SAVE THE DAY!

IF THERE'S DANGER UP AHEAD,
I WON'T RUN, NO WAY. INSTEAD,
I'LL BE STALWART COME WHAT MAY.
YES, I CAN SAVE THE DAY.
I AM YOUNG, THAT MUCH IS TRUE.
WASN'T THERE A TIME WHEN YOU
COULD BE HEARD TO SAY
"I SAVED THE DAY"?
I CAN SAVE THE DAY!

ATTENDANTS

PRINCE REN.
SO WHEN
OH..

OH...
OOH...
AH...

KING TAI

I'm afraid your enthusiasm won't be enough to overcome Na Ta. I should
have trained you myself, and now it's too late.

(#01B) THERE IS A SHAMAN

[Woman, Attendants]

WOMAN

If I may?

THERE IS A SHAMAN
WHO LIVES TO THE NORTH OF HERE.

PRINCE REN

A shaman?

WOMAN

WHO WILL TEACH THE PRINCE
THE THINGS HE NEEDS TO KNOW.
WHATEVER SEEMS CLOUDY
WILL SOON BE MADE VERY CLEAR
WHEN HE JOURNEYS TO
THE KINGDOM OF TIAN GUO.

ATTENDANTS

OOH
AH

OOH

KUANG

Tian Guo is a mythical kingdom.

KING TAI

Not so.

PRINCE REN

But how will I get there?

WOMAN

ATTENDANTS

(to REN)

THE JOURNEY IS LONG

AND THE ROAD MAY BE HARD TO BEAR. ONWARD YOU MUST GO

BUT THE PATH WILL BE

REVEALED, IF YOU TAKE HEED.

USING EVERYTHING YOU KNOW

(to KING TAI)

THE ANSWERS TO ALL OF HIS

QUESTIONS ARE WAITING THERE,

TO REACH TIAN GUO.

FOR TIAN GUO IS WHERE

THE PRINCE WILL LEARN TO LEAD.

KUANG

Your Majesty, the Prince is unfit to endeavor such a journey on his own.

KING TAI

I agree, which is why I have decided that you will accompany him. His life is in your hands.

KUANG

But—

KING TAI

Do not let my son out of your sight. That is a command.

KUANG

(bowing)

I will guard him with my life and bring him back to you as quickly as possible.

PRINCE REN

Great. Let's go! Time is of the essence.

(#01C) THE GIFTS

[Woman, Prince Ren]

WOMAN

Wait! In order to seek an audience with the Shaman, suitable gifts must be found.

KING TAI

In the Hall of Priceless Treasures you will find gold, diamonds, tapestry--

WOMAN

No, none of those will do.

(points to a dusty old chest that has appeared, unnoticed)

What's in that chest?

KUANG

Where did that come from?

WOMAN

(opening the chest)

Ah, yes... this is more like it.

WOMAN

ONE FLUTE,
ONE SADDLE,
ONE STEEL SWORD THAT STINGS,
ONE INK BRUSH FROM A TIGER'S TAIL,
ONE KITE WITH PAPER WINGS.

PRINCE REN

OLD FLUTE?
WORN SADDLE?
SWORD THAT STINGS...?

(The WOMAN returns gifts to the trunk.)

PRINCE REN

These don't seem very worthy, if you ask me.

WOMAN

Chopsticks are of no use to a man without food, unless he wishes to threaten the cook. Do you understand?

(PRINCE REN stares blankly at MASTER WU.)

What may seem useless to you may be valuable to others. Do not let these gifts out of your sight.

PRINCE REN

I promise.

(THE WOMAN exits.)

(#01D) SAVE THE DAY (Part 2)

[Prince Ren, Attendants]

KING TAI

(hands PRINCE REN a document)

Here is a royal edict commanding every subject and official to provide you with all that you may require.

(PRINCE REN puts the edict in his pocket and climbs aboard the chariot.)

PRINCE REN

I'll make you proud, Father. You'll see!

I WILL SAVE THE DAY.

I WILL LEARN ALL THAT I CAN.

AND RETURN TO YOU A MAN.

NOW I'M ON MY WAY.

TIME TO SAVE THE DAY.

I WILL SAVE THE DAY!

PRINCE REN, ATTENDANTS, KUANG

LUCK IS NEEDED TO MOVE FORWARD ON THE JOURNEY.

BY THE WANING MOON YOU'LL REACH THE FARTHEST SHORE.

WHO KNOWS WHAT LIES AHEAD AS YOU MOVE ONWARD TO EXPLORE.

KING TAI

Go learn.

Be careful.

ATTENDANTS, KUANG

WHAT'S IN STORE

FOR THE KINGDOM OF TANG!?!

PRINCE REN

I won't let you down, Father. Onward to Tian Guo!

(Transition to...)