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MARCO POLO'S MARYELOUS, MAGICAL ADVENTURE

CHILDREN'S COMEDY. Marco Polo and his father arrive at the luxurious palace of the great Chinese emperor, Kublai Khan. There, they receive a royal greeting from Khan's overzealous gong-banging wife, who has been promoted to Acting Prime Minister and whose favorite part of her new job is banging the court gong...over and over again. After their ears stop ringing, Khan summons his daughter, Fo-Nee, the court magician, to perform some "magic" tricks for the weary travelers. But it doesn't take long before Marco and his father discover that Fo-Nee could be the world's worst magician! However, the magic of romance is in the air, and Marco and Fo-Nee soon fall in love and begin to make wedding plans. The couple has to make tough decisions like what to eat at the wedding reception—Chinese food, of course! And the dance music? "How Much Is That Shar-pei in the Window"!

Performance Time: Approximately 45 minutes.



Portrait of Marco Polo (left), in costume (right)

ABOUT THE STORY

In 1271, when Marco Polo was 17 years old, he set off from Italy along with his father, Niccolò, and his uncle, Maffeo, to travel to Asia. After a journey of more than 15,000 miles, they returned to Venice 24 years later. At the time of their return, Venice was at war with Genoa, which resulted in Marco's imprisonment. From his cell, Marco dictated his many travel adventures to a fellow inmate and these stories were later published as *The Travels of Marco Polo (Il Milione)*. Marco was eventually freed and went on to become a wealthy merchant. In 1300, Marco married the daughter of an Italian merchant and had three daughters.

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 2 F)

MARCO POLO: Young adventurer from Italy; wears an Izod polo shirt.

KUBLAI KHAN: Emperor of China; wears a royal robe.

YU WY-NING: Khan's wife who serves as his acting Prime Minister and loves to bang the gong; speaks with a whiny voice; wears a royal robe.

FO-NEE: Khan's daughter and the court magician; speaks with a sing-song voice; wears a royal robe. (Pronounced "phony.")

NICCOLÒ: Marco's father.

SETTING

1274, China. Kublai Khan's palace.

SET

Kublai Khan's throne room. There is a large throne for Khan and a smaller throne SR for Wy-Ning. A large gong sits between the two thrones. Note: A large gong cutout and sound effects can be used instead of a real gong.

Khan's palace garden. There is a bench with some shrubs.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Khan's throne room.

Scene 2: Khan's throne room, two years later.

Scene 3: Khan's palace garden, six months later.

Scene 4: Khan's throne room, one year later.

PROPS

Small plastic dagger	Blue silk scarf
Gong with mallet or large cutout of a gong	White silk scarf
2 Plastic or stuffed chickens	Small sundial wristwatch
Sack	Kaftan and headdress, for Fo-Nee
Deck of cards	Kaftan, for Marco
Vase	

SOUND EFFECT

Sound of a gong (if a real gong isn't used)

**"PLEASE STAY AWAY
FROM THAT GONG!"**

—KUBLAI KHAN

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: 1280, China. Throne room of Kublai Khan. Kublai Khan is sitting on a large throne, cleaning his nails with a small dagger and polishing them on his robe. There is another small throne to his right, and a large gong between the two thrones. The prime minister, Wy-Ning, runs into the room and prostrates before Khan.)

WY-NING: *(Always speaks in a whining voice.)* Oh Great Kublai Khan, Exalted Light of the East, Defender of the Sacred Scrolls, Most Magnificent Majesty...

KHAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah! Enough already, Wy-Ning. You're giving me a headache! Get up! Get up! Approach me. What's all the excitement about?

WY-NING: He has returned. *(Stands and approaches Khan.)*

KHAN: *Who...has returned? Who?*

WY-NING: That guy from Italy...that Polo guy!

KHAN: Ah! Signor Niccolò Polo! He has finally come back!

WY-NING: Yes, oh, Great One, he is back.

KHAN: Well, go get him. Don't make him wait outside. Where are your manners, Wy-Ning? Bring him in. Oh, and Yu Wy-Ning, just because I promoted you from First Wife to Acting Prime Minister, don't go get carried away with the gong. And you gotta be very nice to Signor Polo.

WY-NING: Yes, sire and loving husband, I will bring him in right away. And I will always be nice to Signor Polo. *(Exits.)*

KHAN: Oh, boy! My favorite foreigner! My Merchant of Venice! Signor Niccolò Polo!

(Wy-Ning enters with Niccolò and Marco close behind.)

WY-NING: Your Excellency. Here's...Niccolò! *(Indicating Marco.)* And here's...another one, too...some kid...I have no idea...

KHAN: Yes, yes, I see them. *(To Marco and Niccolò.)* Come in, welcome back, oh, weary travelers. *(Wy-Ning bangs the gong, startling everyone. Shouts.)* Ahhhh! Wy-Ning, don't do that!

WY-NING: Sorry, Your Royal Highness. *(Stands by the smaller throne to the right of Khan and in front of gong.)*

NICCOLÒ: Good to see you again, Prime Minister Wy-Ning, and we thank you for your most warm welcome, oh Great Khan. But we're really not that weary. We took the short cut through Constantinople and came over the Silk Road. Lovely new road, like an expressway.

KHAN: Aha! That must have saved you at least three months! But it is very good to see you again.

NICCOLÒ: Thank you, and it is good to see you again, too, Your Magnificence. I was told to take a right turn in Damascus, but you know me...I refused to ask for directions at the oasis, so it took us a little longer. And you look mah-velous, Khan.

KHAN: And I feel good, too!

NICCOLÒ: Ah, but it is so much better to *look* mah-velous than to feel good! And *you* look mah-velous!

KHAN: That is true. Thank you, thank you, Niccolò Polo. So...you had a pleasant journey?

NICCOLÒ: Yes, we did.

KHAN: I was hoping you would be back sooner than this, but at last you have returned.

NICCOLÒ: We might have come back earlier, Your Magnificence, but the rickshaw service between here and Venice is terrible. And there are so many commuters on the road. They are starting to pave it, so there's construction all over the Silk Road now. There's so much traffic coming through Damascus now, they even have a crossing guard.

MARCO: Yes, Great Khan, we saw four caravans going back and forth between here and there.

NICCOLÒ: Nothing but camels, camels, and more camels. Every now and then...a yak! Boy, those are such smelly creatures!

KHAN: Perhaps some day they will add a high-occupancy rickshaw lane on that road. And if we go with elephants, we could make it a howdah lane. Now that's the thing that really gets to me. Those great big howdahs perched on top of those great big elephants are a terrible traffic hazard. When I traveled that route years ago, we had to leave the Silk Road three times and walk in the soft sand...and you know how difficult that is. What they should do is to impose a duty on those oversize things...make the owners pay for the howdahs! That's it! They should charge a duty because those things are so huge. It's time to make them pay an extra toll for oversize howdahs! Yes, sir, I think it's [Howdah Duty] time. But...I digress...until then... (*Slight pause.*) Tell me, Niccolò, who is this young man you have brought with you who I have not met before? [*"Howdy Doody" time.*]

NICCOLÒ: Your Highness, may I present my son, Marco...Marco Polo.

KHAN: Aha, your son. (*To Marco.*) You have the look of an adventurer, young man.

MARCO: Thank you, Your Highness.

KHAN: But tell me, what is this strange garb that you wear? I have never seen anything like it in the provinces.

MARCO: Oh, this is a shirt of my own design. I got the material, made the pattern, cut it out and sewed it all by myself.

KHAN: What name do you call it, Marco?

MARCO: Well, obviously, oh, Great Khan...it's a *Polo* shirt. It's very light and very comfortable—much better than chainmail and much cooler in the summertime.

KHAN: Ah, summertime...and the livin' is easy. Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high. (*Inspects Marco's shirt.*) Yes, I can see how light the fabric is.

MARCO: Would you like me to make you a shirt like mine?

KHAN: Would you do that for me?

MARCO: Sure. No problemo. Uh...that's Italian for non perspirato...no sweat. A needle, some thread, a little fabric...that's all I'll need.

(Khan crosses to Marco.)

KHAN: Sounds like a winner to me. Let the royal tailors help you, too. They have all my measurements. I happen to be a perfect extra large...right off the rack at the discount market mall.

MARCO: Thank you, Your Highness. I'll be honored to make you one.

KHAN: Marco, I think this might be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. *(Puts his arm around Marco's shoulder. Wy-Ning bangs the gong, startling everyone again. Shouts.)* Ahhhh! Now cut that out, Wy-Ning!

WY-NING: Sorry, Your Majesty. I got carried away.

KHAN: One more time, and I'll have you carried away! *(To Niccolò and Marco.)* Anyway, I am happy to be your friend, Niccolò and Marco. Ha! Sounds a little like the Marx Brothers, doesn't it?

MARCO: Yes, it does, and I am honored, oh Great Khan.

NICCOLÒ: As am I! Just think...my son, the Khan's friend!

(Niccolò puts his arm around Marco's shoulder. Wy-Ning is about to bang the gong again.)

KHAN: *(To Wy-Ning, yells.)* Don't do it!

WY-NING: I am sorry, Your Majesty. I'm just so excited at Signor Polo being here again.

KHAN: Fine. Just put down the hammer and sit!

WY-NING: Yes, oh Great One. *(Sits on her throne.)*

KHAN: *(Like Elvis.)* Thank you...thank you very much. Now, tell me, Niccolò, where are the friars I asked you to bring back with you on this trip?

NICCOLÒ: Ah! Right here, Khan! (*Produces two chickens from the sack he is carrying.*)

KHAN: I'm afraid that I didn't mean those kind of *fryers*. When you were here the first time, I decided that I wanted my people to come to understand Christianity. I meant for you to bring *friars*...from the church.

NICCOLÒ: Oh, *those* kinds of friars! Forgive me, Your Eminence, I thought you meant these kind. My Maria makes a chicken parmigiana with this kind of fryer that is to die for! A little tomato sauce and a hoagie bun on the side, a glass of Chianti wine...delicious!

KHAN: What we have here is a failure to communicate. Oh, never mind. Acting Prime Minister Wy-Ning, take these two *fryers* to the kitchen and have the cook whip up something festive for all of us.

WY-NING: How about some chicken chow mein, oh Great Khan?

KHAN: Chow mein? Nah, too western. Make it something with a kick to it. My doctor said to put some spice in my life.

WY-NING: I've got the ticket. I'll have him whip up some Szechwan chicken. (*Exits carrying the sack.*)

KHAN: Sounds good to me. (*To Marco and Niccolò.*) You guys hungry?

NICCOLÒ: I could eat.

MARCO: (*To Khan.*) I'm starved, too. Did you ever know a teenaged boy who couldn't eat something?

KHAN: Ha-ha! That's true! Marco Polo, you tickle me!

MARCO: Oh, no, sir! I didn't tickle you. I swear I didn't do it!

NICCOLÒ: Son, what the Great Khan meant was that you make him laugh. He means he likes your attitude about teenagers.

MARCO: Oh, I didn't understand, Papa.

KHAN: That's all right. But it is true. You make me laugh, Marco Polo! You should be very proud of your son, Niccolò Polo.

NICCOLÒ: Oh, I am, I am! He recently turned 18, you know.

(Wy-Ning enters and sits on her throne.)

KHAN: And I now love the fact that I have two new friends.

(Khan puts his arms around Niccolò and Marco's shoulders.)

NICCOLÒ/MARCO: You do?

KHAN: Yes, I do. Even though you didn't bring me the friars I wanted, you meant well, and you shall be rewarded.

NICCOLÒ: Well, all right! High-fives!

(Niccolò and Marco high-five each other.)

KHAN: What is this strange form of celebration I see?

NICCOLÒ: Well, Great Khan, as you know, we're from Venice...in Italy...

MARCO: *(To Khan.)* And we sometimes tend to talk a lot with our hands.

NICCOLÒ: *(To Khan.)* So we give each other these high-fives as a form of joy!

MARCO: *(To Khan.)* Yes, we do it all the time. But that's just us.

NICCOLÒ: *(To Khan.)* Yes, just us. I don't think it will ever catch on.

MARCO: I think you might be mistaken about that, Papa.

NICCOLÒ: Ahh, maybe you're right, Marco. It's amazing what the teenagers of today come up with, isn't it, oh Great Khan.

KHAN: I agree, Niccolò. I also believe your son is right. I like it. Wy-Ning...

WY-NING: *(Jumps to her feet.)* Yes, My Lord?

KHAN: Come here and give me one of those high-fives. I want to experience one, too.

WY-NING: (*Whining.*) Awww, do I have to, oh Great Khan? It seems so...silly.

KHAN: Oh, stop whining, Wy-Ning! Come here...now.

(*Wy-Ning crosses to Khan.*)

WY-NING: Oh, all right. (*Khan gives her a high-five.*) Oww! That hurts! (*Shakes and rubs hand.*)

KHAN: Stop being such a baby, Acting Prime Minister and Not-So-Acting First Wife.

WY-NING: Yes, My Lord. I am truly sorry. Forgive me. (*Returns to throne.*)

KHAN: You know, Niccolò, if we only had four fingers, you would have to say "high-fours"! Or if we were cartoon characters, we would have to say "high-threes"! Ha-ha! (*All laugh.*) And now, gentlemen, how would you like some entertainment?

MARCO: All right!

NICCOLÒ: (*To Khan.*) We would love some entertainment.

KHAN: Good! Wy-Ning, fetch me our court magician, our beautiful daughter, the wonderful Fo-Nee. (*Pronounced "phony."*)

WY-NING: (*Jumps up.*) As you wish, My Lord.

KHAN: And have dinner served in about an hour, too.

WY-NING: Yes, My Lord. I will inform the cook. (*Exits.*)

NICCOLÒ: My Lord, I notice that you have two beautiful new thrones...yours and Wy-Ning's.

KHAN: Yes, I decided that the old ones were not very comfortable. And ergonomics had something to do with it, too. We're going green.

NICCOLÒ: Really?

KHAN: Yes. But the old thrones are still so exquisite that I wanted to put them on display for all the people of the city to see and admire the beautiful craftsmanship. They will see

that the government is not wasteful, throwing things like that away, but making them museum pieces instead and declaring them historical landmarks.

NICCOLÒ: That's a wonderful idea. So what are you going to do?

KHAN: I thought I would build a house of glass and stow them in there so that they could be seen by all.

NICCOLÒ: Well, that might be all right, Your Majesty, but...

KHAN: Is something wrong with that idea, Niccolò Polo?

NICCOLÒ: No, not really...but just remember that people with glass houses shouldn't stow thrones.

KHAN: Aha! Good thinking. Perhaps I'll just settle for a brick house.

(Fo-Nee enters with Wy-Ning.)

FO-NEE: *(Speaks in sing-song fashion.)* You sent for me, my father?

KHAN: Yes, Fo-Nee. We have visitors from another part of the world...a land called "Italy." The older gentleman was here before, but you may have been too little to remember him.

FO-NEE: Oh, I think it is wonderful that we have visitors, but I do not remember him!

KHAN: Beloved daughter Fo-Nee, this is Niccolò Polo...
(Niccolò bows to her.) ...and this young man is Niccolò's son, Marco Polo.

(Marco bows to Fo-Nee.)

FO-NEE: Welcome to Cathay, gentlemen strangers.

NICCOLÒ: Your father says that you are the court magician, Fo-Nee.

FO-NEE: That is true.

MARCO: But you are so young.

FO-NEE: I am of marrying age...sixteen.

MARCO: Sixteen? That is still very young, especially for marriage.

FO-NEE: Perhaps in your land, but not here in Cathay.

KHAN: *(To Niccolò and Marco.)* I appointed her court magician to keep her from hanging out on street corners and in bowling alleys like so many other teenagers. Studying her magic keeps her out of trouble.

FO-NEE: *(To Niccolò and Marco.)* Would you like to see some of my magic? I can show you a mind-reading trick.

NICCOLÒ/MARCO: Oh, yes!

(Fo-Nee produces a deck of cards from a pocket within her robe.)

FO-NEE: Here... *(Extending cards to Niccolò.)* ...pick a card, any card! And do not let me see it.

NICCOLÒ: All right.

(Niccolò picks a card. Fo-Nee holds her hands over her eyes.)

FO-NEE: Concentrate, Niccolò Polo, so that I may see the card you choose in my own eyes as well as deep within my soul.

NICCOLÒ: All right, I'm concentrating.

FO-NEE: Concentrate harder! *(He grimaces, closes his eyes, and concentrates.)* It is coming to me now...keep concentrating.

NICCOLÒ: Oh, I am, I am!

FO-NEE: Aha! I have it! Your card is the five of clubs!

(Niccolò shows her the card.)

NICCOLÒ: No, sorry. It's the... *(Names the actual card and shows it to her.)*

FO-NEE: Oh! My soul has let me down. All right, back to the old drawing board.

(Fo-Nee takes the card from Niccolò and starts to exit.)

KHAN: Good try, Daughter!

FO-NEE: Thank you, Father.

MARCO: Wait, let her try it again!

KHAN: Sure, why not? I've got nothing pressing. Go ahead, Fo-Nee.

FO-NEE: All right. One more time. Maybe I will have better luck with someone closer to my own age. Marco Polo, you pick a card this time.

MARCO: All right...here goes. *(Picks a card.)*

FO-NEE: Concentrate, Marco Polo! *(Marco closes his eyes and concentrates.)* I begin to see a card now...keep concentrating.

MARCO: I am! I am!

FO-NEE: Aha! I have it! Your card is the seven of diamonds!

MARCO: No, I'm sorry... *(Shows her card.)* It's the... *(Names the actual card.)*

FO-NEE: That makes me two for two...*not!* I guess I need to study some more. Maybe I need more soul. I should go and play some blues on my lute, my little harp.

MARCO: Lyre.

FO-NEE: I do not lie! I tell the truth!

MARCO: No, no! A lyre... *(Spells.)* ...L-Y-R-E. It's like a small harp. A lute is more like a small mandolin.

FO-NEE: Whatever. Mandolin, shmandolin...I will play the blues anyway. *(Exits.)*

KHAN: *(To Niccolò and Marco.)* She isn't very good at her magic, but she tries so hard!

NICCOLÒ: Yes, she does.

MARCO: *(To Khan.)* And she's very pretty, too.

KHAN: Aha! The young Polo has an eye for beauty!

MARCO: *(Embarrassed.)* Well...she is pretty.

KHAN: That she is. Takes after her father!

NICCOLÒ: I'm thinking that she may have some of her mother in there, too. Speaking of mothers, I hope *your* mother is doing well without us, Marco.

MARCO: Papa, Mama is a very strong lady. I'm sure she's fine.

NICCOLÒ: Ah, then what am I worried about? She's fine.

MARCO: I'm sure she is, Papa.

KHAN: Without a doubt. Now, gentlemen, let's go and eat!
(*Wy-Ning bangs gong. To Wy-Ning, shouts.*) Now cut that out!

(*All exit. Blackout.*)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Khan's palace, two years later. Khan is seated on his throne. Wy-Ning enters and approaches him.)

WY-NING: My lord, the Polos have requested that they be allowed to leave so that they may return to Italy.

KHAN: Well, they have been here for more than two years so I can understand why they want to go home. Ask them to come to me. I wish to speak to them.

WY-NING: Yes, My Lord and Master. (Starts to exit, but Niccolò and Marco enter.) Ah, here they are now!

KHAN: Welcome, Niccolò and Marco Polo. Come in. Come in. I understand that you wish to leave China.

NICCOLÒ: Yes, oh Great One. We think it's time to return home.

MARCO: (To Khan.) We miss our country dearly.

KHAN: I shall miss *you* dearly, but if it is your wish to return home, then I wish you Buddha speed.

NICCOLÒ/MARCO: Thank you, Your Majesty.

KHAN: But I have one request of you...a favor. I would like you, Marco, to remain here for a little longer as my trusted advisor.

WY-NING: Hey, what about me?

KHAN: Hush up, Wy-Ning. You are only *acting* Prime Minister.

WY-NING: But I am still Number-One Wife!

KHAN: All right, all right...

NICCOLÒ: I see no reason why he can't stay, Your Majesty, but I think it should be *his* decision.

MARCO: Thank you, Papa. And it will be a tough decision. I have reasons to want to go and reasons to want to stay, too.

You see, Great Khan, I've become very fond of Fo-Nee...and I believe she is very fond of me also.

KHAN: Aha! Wy-Ning, bring Fo-Nee to me.

(Fo-Nee enters.)

FO-NEE: Did I just hear my name mentioned, Illustrious Father?

KHAN: Ah, Fo-Nee, my beautiful daughter, it is good to see you.

FO-NEE: And you as well, my All-Knowing Father.

KHAN: Perhaps *not* so all-knowing. Marco Polo has been telling me that you and he have grown fond of each other.

FO-NEE: That is true, Father. Marco and I have been talking, and it seems that we share the same interests in many things.

MARCO: (To Khan.) That is true, Your Majesty, but we would never do anything without your Royal Highness's permission.

KHAN: (To Marco and Fo-Nee.) Do you two wish to get married?

FO-NEE: Oh, yes! I mean...I think so...but maybe I'm still too young.

MARCO: (To Khan.) Uh...I'm not sure either...I guess so...but there is one small problem.

KHAN: Problem?

MARCO: Yes, Your Majesty. I left someone at home...in Italy...and I promised to come back to her...but that was before I met Fo-Nee.

KHAN: I see. That problem is a very big one. But I would still like you to stay and see how you and Fo-nee can resolve this problem.

NICCOLÒ: Marco, the Emperor has asked a very big favor of you. I think you should consider staying for a while. I'll go home and see if I can do something in Italy while you stay here with the Khan.

KHAN: That sounds super to me. How about it, Marco?

MARCO: Certainly. Whatever you wish, oh Great Khan, will be my command.

KHAN: I am making you an offer that you cannot refuse.

What will you do, Niccolò?

NICCOLÒ: Marco, I will return to Italy. And you remain here with the Emperor as his advisor.

MARCO: I would be very honored, Great Khan.

FO-NEE: So, Marco Polo, you will remain here?

MARCO: Yes, I will be most happy to honor the Emperor's request.

FO-NEE: Oh, that is wonderful, Marco Polo!

KHAN: Aha! It seems as though my daughter is very happy to have you stay here with her, Marco.

MARCO: I am happy to stay here with your daughter...and you, of course.

KHAN: Of course! Then it is decided. Niccolò, let us see to your needs and leave these two alone.

FO-NEE: Wait! Please, I wish to try my magic trick one more time. (*Produces a deck of cards.*) Here, Niccolò Polo, you pick a card.

(Niccolò picks a card.)

NICCOLÒ: All right.

FO-NEE: Don't let me see it.

NICCOLÒ: Oh, don't worry. I won't.

FO-NEE: (*Holds her hands over her eyes.*) Close your eyes and concentrate, Niccolò Polo, so that I may see the card within my soul.

NICCOLÒ: Haven't had a lot of luck with that, have you?

MARCO: Papa!

NICCOLÒ: Sorry. (*To Fo-Nee.*) All right, I'm concentrating.

FO-NEE: Concentrate harder! (*Niccolò grimaces, closes his eyes, and concentrates. Marco mimes to the others not to say anything, peeks at the card, taps Fo-Nee on the shoulder, and signals to her. To Niccolò.*) It is coming to me now...keep concentrating.

NICCOLÒ: I am! I am!

FO-NEE: Aha! I have it! You may open your eyes now!
(*Niccolò opens his eyes.*) Your card is...

(*Fo-Nee names the card Marco signaled to her. Niccolò shows her the card.*)

NICCOLÒ: (*Surprised.*) Well, I'll be a panda's uncle! She did it! She actually did it!

MARCO: (*Teasing.*) Your name begins to make a lot of sense, Fo-Nee!

FO-NEE: Shhhh!

MARCO: Don't worry, Fo-Nee, your secret is safe with me.

NICCOLÒ: You know how she did it? Tell me! Tell me! How did she do it?

MARCO: (*Looks around furtively.*) Magic, Papa, magic!

KHAN: That is as it should be. Come, Niccolò, let us see to your provisions. You have a long journey ahead of you.

(*Khan, Niccolò, and Wy-Ning exit.*)

MARCO: (*To Fo-Nee.*) Well, my papa was really fooled that time.

FO-NEE: But it was all trickery. You peeked at the card and you told me what it was.

MARCO: That's how most magic is done. It's all fakery and trickery. There's no such thing as *real* magic.

FO-NEE: I did not know that. But how else can you do a card trick without guessing?

MARCO: Well, you can't guess at a card. If you do, you'll be wrong most of the time. The odds are 51 to 1 against you.

FO-NEE: So guessing is no good, I guess.

MARCO: That's true. Tell me, Fo-Nee, why did you become the court magician anyway?

FO-NEE: That was a big mistake on my part. When my father asked if I wanted to be the court magician, I thought he said, court *musician*, so I said yes because I love to sing and make

music with my lute...ah, I mean, lyre. But I only play for my father.

MARCO: Does your father like your music when you play for him?

FO-NEE: Oh, yes, he knew I always wanted to play "The Palace."

MARCO: Do you ever play for anyone else? Like Wy-Ning? She's always with your father.

FO-NEE: Wy-Ning protects my father from evil men. She always remains at his side. My mother is a good wife. But, no, I am still strictly an amateur, and I am afraid that if Wy-Ning hears me play, she will give me the gong.

MARCO: You should have told your father right away that you made a mistake.

FO-NEE: Oh, no! I could not disappoint my father!

MARCO: But he could have hired a *real* court magician.

FO-NEE: Unfortunately, no. Economy is so bad in China that Father has no money in the treasury. He is still paying the contractors for construction of the Great Wall. They are all union workers and Father is stuck with the bill. And the work is still going on.

MARCO: Wow, that's too bad.

FO-NEE: You bet. It's very bad. I told Father that the one who was Emperor then shouldn't have hired only union help.

MARCO: Why was the Wall built in the first place?

FO-NEE: We need to keep out the Mongols, the Manchurians, and the crazy Muppets. They are very barbaric people—not too civilized. Not like Chinese culture. We Chinese are very civilized. There is an old saying: "Once a barbarian, always a barbarian."

MARCO: Oh, I see.

FO-NEE: I asked Father, "Why not just put up 'No Trespassing' signs?" But he said that barbarians can't read, so signs would do no good. We teach our Chinese children

to read so the Emperor says that no child is ever left behind.
We are very smart people.

MARCO: That's true. Say, you know, I have a wonderful idea. Here, let me show you a trick that you can perform without guessing at anything.

FO-NEE: No guessing?

MARCO: No.

FO-NEE: All right. Show me, please.

MARCO: Good. First I need this vase... *(Gets vase near throne.)* ...and now I need to borrow that blue silk kerchief that you always carry.

FO-NEE: Sure. Like you sometimes say, "No problemo."

(Fo-Nee gives Marco the kerchief.)

MARCO: Good. Now, here's my white silk kerchief. *(Produces a white scarf.)* Look inside this vase. *(Fo-Nee looks inside the vase.)* Tell me, what do you see in here?

FO-NEE: *(Looking in.)* There is nothing in there. I see that the vase is empty.

MARCO: Good. Now watch closely... *(Fo-Nee leans in close.)* ...uh, Fo-Nee, you need to give me a little more room here.

(Fo-Nee backs off two steps.)

FO-NEE: Oh, sorry. I am too close?

MARCO: Just a little. Any closer and you would be in back of me. That's good. Right there. Now, I place the white kerchief into the vase... *(Puts white kerchief into vase.)* ...and then I place the blue kerchief into the vase with it... *(Puts blue kerchief into vase.)*

FO-NEE: The vase is not empty anymore?

MARCO: No, the vase is no longer empty. That's right. Now I say the magic words...

FO-NEE: *(Amazed.)* You know magic words?

MARCO: Why, of course. Every magician does.

FO-NEE: You are a magician?

MARCO: Not really...but I know how to do this trick. Just watch and learn.

FO-NEE: All right. I watch...and I learn. Say the magic words!

MARCO: All right. *(Waves his hand over vase.)* Moo goo gai pan, egg foo yung! Now, I remove the kerchiefs one by one... *(Takes out the white kerchief.)* ...and the blue kerchief has magically turned to white.

FO-NEE: Ah! *(Catches her breath.)*

(Marco removes the blue kerchief from the vase.)

MARCO: And the white kerchief has transformed into a blue one!

FO-NEE: Oh, no! *(Suspiciously.)* Hey, do you have any more kerchiefs up your sleeve?

MARCO: No, I have no more kerchiefs up my sleeve.

FO-NEE: Then how did you do that trick? That is one amazing trick, I tell you! I am baffled!

MARCO: Do you really want to know the secret to how I did the trick?

FO-NEE: Yes, please! Tell Fo-Nee. Please tell Fo-Nee the secret!

MARCO: All right. The secret is...

FO-NEE: Yes, yes?

MARCO: The secret is...that I *lied* to you.

(Pause.)

FO-NEE: You *lied* to Fo-Nee?

MARCO: Yes, I lied to you.

FO-NEE: You are a very bad man, Marco Polo, for lying to me! *(Punches him in the arm gently.)*

MARCO: Ow! Easy, easy. I lied to you because I wanted to show you that all magic is based on trickery, deceit, and lies.

FO-NEE: So you lie, you trick, *and* you deceive me, too?

MARCO: Yes, but it was only so that you would understand what really happened.

FO-NEE: I still do not understand what happened. Show me the trick again.

MARCO: All right. Watch closely again. (*Places both kerchiefs into vase.*)

FO-NEE: I'll give you plenty of room. I see the vase is not empty again.

MARCO: No, the vase is not empty again. And now I say the magic words...

FO-NEE: Same magic words?

MARCO: Yes...the same ones.

FO-NEE: Say the magic words again! I will watch closely again...and *listen* closely, too.

MARCO: All right. (*Waves hand over vase.*) Moo goo gai pan, egg foo yung! Same as before, I take out one of the kerchiefs... (*Takes out white kerchief.*) ...and the blue kerchief has magically turned to white. (*Takes out blue kerchief.*) And the white kerchief has again become transformed into a blue one!

FO-NEE: I watched very closely...but I still do not see how you did such an amazing trick with no more kerchiefs up your sleeve. Oh! Wait, I forgot! You said that you lied to me. (*Pause. Thinks.*) But what did you lie about?

MARCO: What I lied to you about was that the kerchiefs did not change color at all. I only *told* you that they had changed.

FO-NEE: Oh, that is one *big* lie!

MARCO: Right. The white kerchief was never changed into the blue one and the blue one was never changed into the white one. As I said, I only *told* you that they had changed color. And you believed me.

FO-NEE: Sure I believed you. I trusted you.

MARCO: And that's what makes the trick work so well. The more you trust, the more you are willing to believe.

FO-NEE: I am a perfect sucker because I believed you.

MARCO: But isn't it a wonderful trick?

FO-NEE: It is a *very* wonderful trick. I will try it sometime.

MARCO: You know, I've known you now for more than two years. I thought you were planning to get married when you turned 18. I just wasn't sure about things myself...

FO-NEE: And I don't know if I'm really ready yet, either. Maybe I am still waiting for Mr. Right. I am very confused because of the feelings I have for you.

MARCO: I understand. But do you think that this...Mr. Right will ever come along?

FO-NEE: I think he already did, but I don't think he realizes how strongly I feel about him. He sees me, but he does *not* see me! Not as I really am.

MARCO: I think he does...

FO-NEE: You mean me.

MARCO: Of course.

FO-NEE: I am flattered. Thank you, Marco Polo.

(Wy-Ning Enters.)

WY-NING: Marco Polo, your father is ready to leave now. He asks that you to come say goodbye to him.

MARCO: All right. You come, too, Fo-Nee. He'll want to say goodbye to you, too.

FO-NEE: I will be there in a minute. I want to show the new magic trick to Wy-Ning. All right?

MARCO: *(Laughs.)* Sure. *(Exits.)*

WY-NING: *(To Fo-Nee.)* You have a new magic trick?

FO-NEE: Yes.

WY-NING: I hope it is better than your card tricks.

FO-NEE: Oh, yes! This new magic trick will amaze you!

WY-NING: All right. I am ready to be amazed.

FO-NEE: Good. First I need this vase... *(Gets vase.)* ...and now I show you my blue silk kerchief that I always carry.

WY-NING: I see.

FO-NEE: Good. Now, here is Marco Polo's white silk kerchief. Look inside this vase. (*Wy-Ning looks inside the vase.*) Tell me, what do you see in here?

WY-NING: (*Looking in.*) I see an empty vase.

FO-NEE: Watch closely, Wy-Ning.

WY-NING: I am watching *very* closely.

FO-NEE: Good. I place the white kerchief into the vase. (*Puts the white kerchief in the vase.*) ...and then I place the blue kerchief into the vase... (*Puts the blue kerchief into the vase.*) The vase is no longer empty, right?

WY-NING: The vase is not empty anymore. Both kerchiefs are in the vase. I see them.

FO-NEE: That's right. Now I say the magic words...

WY-NING: Magic words?

FO-NEE: Yes, these words are very magical. You will see.

WY-NING: Say the magic words!

FO-NEE: All right. (*Waves her hand over the vase.*) Moo goo gai pan, egg foo yung! Now, I remove the kerchiefs from the vase one by one... (*Takes out white kerchief.*) ... and the blue kerchief has magically turned to white.

WY-NING: Oh! It changed color!

(*Fo-Nee takes out the blue kerchief.*)

FO-NEE: And the white kerchief magically transforms into the blue one!

WY-NING: Aieeee! *Both* kerchiefs changed color! It *is* magic!

FO-NEE: You like this new magic trick?

WY-NING: There must be a simple explanation, but right now I am stunned!

FO-NEE: Good! You stay stunned. I will go and say goodbye. Have fun trying to figure out the trick.

(*Fo-Nee gives Wy-Ning the vase and kerchiefs and then exits.*)

WY-NING: *(To herself.)* I cannot explain what I just saw...it is truly magic. *(Takes vase and kerchiefs and tries to do the trick herself.)* I put kerchiefs into the vase, like so. I say the magic words... *(Waves hand over vase.)* "Moo goo gai pan, egg foo yung!" Then I take the kerchiefs out of the vase, one at a time... *(Pulls out white kerchief.)* Ah! No good. The white kerchief is still white. *(Pulls out blue kerchief.)* Still no good! The blue kerchief is still blue! Something is very fishy here. But I do not know what! What did I do wrong? How did she do it? How? Fo-Nee is one smart cookie! And it is my good fortune to know her, so that makes her one smart fortune cookie! *(Keeps trying to do trick as she exits mumbling to herself. Lights fade to black.)*

[END OF FREEVIEW]