

THE BALLAD OF MULAN

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Long ago, in a village in northern China, there lived a girl named Mulan. One day, she sat at her loom weaving cloth. Click-clack! Click-clack! went the loom. Suddenly, the sound of weaving changed to sorrowful sighs. "What troubles you?" her mother asked. "Nothing, Mother," Mulan softly replied. Her mother asked her again and again, until Mulan finally said, "There is news of war." "Invaders are attacking. The Emperor is calling for troops. Last night, I saw the draft poster and twelve scrolls of names in the market. Father's name is on every one." "But Father is old and frail," Mulan sighed. "How can he fight? He has no grown son and I have no elder brother."

"I will go to the markets. I shall buy a saddle and a horse. I must fight in Father's place." From the eastern market Mulan bought a horse, and from the western market, a saddle. From the southern market she bought a bridle, and from the northern market, a whip. At dawn Mulan dressed in her

armor and bid a sad farewell to her father, mother, sister, and brother. Then she mounted her horse and rode off with the soldiers.

By nightfall she was camped by the bank of the Yellow River. She thought she heard her mother calling her name. But it was only the sound of the river crying.

At sunrise Mulan took leave of the Yellow River. At dusk she reached the peak of Black Mountain. In the darkness she longed to hear her father's voice but heard only the neighing of enemy horses far away. Mulan rode ten thousand miles to fight a hundred battles. She crossed peaks and passes like a bird in flight.

Nights at the camp were harsh and cold, but Mulan endured every hardship. Knowing her father was safe warmed her heart. The war dragged on. Fierce battles ravaged the land. One after another, noble generals lost their lives.

Mulan's skill and courage won her respect and rank. After ten years, she returned as a great general, triumphant and victorious! The Emperor

summoned Mulan to the High Palace. He praised her for her bravery and leadership in battle. The Court would bestow many great titles upon her. Mulan would be showered with gifts of gold. "Worthy General, you may have your heart's desire," the Emperor said. "I have no need for honors or gold," Mulan replied. "All I ask for is a light camel to take me back home." The Emperor sent a troop to escort Mulan on her trip.

In town, the news of Mulan's return created great excitement. Holding each other, her proud parents walked to the village gate to welcome her. Waiting at home, Mulan's sister beautified herself. Her brother sharpened his knife to prepare a pig and sheep for the feast in Mulan's honor. Home at last! Mulan threw open her bedroom door and smiled. She removed her armor and changed into one of her favorite dresses. She brushed out her shiny black hair and pasted a yellow flower on her face. She looked into the mirror and smiled again, happy to be home. Mulan replied, "They say the male rabbit likes to hop and leap, while the female rabbit prefers to sit still. But in times of danger, when the two rabbits scurry by, who can

tell male from female?"

Mulan's glory spread through the land. And to this day, we sing of this brave woman who loved her family and served her country, asking for nothing in return.