

# Legend of the Phoenix

By Ariel

"Mayleen, dinner's ready!" her mom called out. Mayleen sighed and put her book down. She was just at an intense chapter and now she couldn't read it. "Hey, are you coming or not?" It was a boy's voice this time, most likely her brother's. "I'm coming, I'm coming," she called out. Slowly trudging down the stairs, Mayleen could smell the delicious waft of food. "Finally, you're here," her older sister muttered. Geez, she thought, *my sister really doesn't have good manners*. Sitting down at the table, Maleen stared at the food in front of her. It was rice, vegetables and a fish. They usually had that for dinner and she was bored of it, but it was better than nothing. Quickly shoving some rice in her mouth, she tried to eat as fast as she could. Mayleen wanted to get to her story immediately. "Slow down, little sister," Mulan, her older sister, said calmly. "You'll choke yourself." Horrified that she could choke herself, Mayleen stopped shovelling food into her mouth and ate small spoonfuls of rice. "It doesn't matter," her dad told them calmly. "You can eat as fast as you can but not too fast because then you will choke." Soon, after what seemed like forever, she had finished the food and ran up to her room. "Finally, back to my book," Mayleen said happily. While sitting on her bed, she held the thick bamboo scroll and started the chapter.

The next day, Mayleen woke up with her book on her face. Groggily, she sat up and rubbed her eyes. It was unusually warm for a day in February. As she looked up, the sunlight shone on her face. Turning around, Mayleen saw Daiyu sleeping peacefully. Daiyu was a little black and white kitten who was very gentle and loved to play. She had shining blue eyes that glistened in the sunlight. Her fur was the softest type she has ever touched before. Most importantly, Daiyu was always there when she needed her. Mayleen slowly walked over to the kitten and stroked her pitch black fur. Almost instantly, the kitten's eyes fluttered open. She made a gentle purr and then cuddled Mayleen. At the exact moment, the bedroom door flew open. It was Mulan. "Mom has been calling you for ages," Mulan said bitterly. "Now, she sent me to get you." Mayleen gulped. Her older sister had a reputation in the village for being a bad-tempered, strong girl. Mulan put a strong hand on her wrist and pulled her out. "You don't need to pull me out," Mayleen complained. "Fine," her sister mumbled. Keeping a safe distance from Mulan, Mayleen managed to arrive in the dining table alive.

Her family's eyes glared at her as she sat down. "What?" Mayleen demanded. "Oh nothing, just that you're twenty minutes late for breakfast!" Manchu, her older brother, shouted. Ignoring her annoying brother, Mayleen quickly rolled her eyes at him and got a piece of bread. "I got to go," she called out, half way between the stairs and the dining room.

"Wait!" her mum said. Mayleen groaned. She was desperate to play with her kitten. "You forgot to bring milk to Daiyu." As quick as possible, Mayleen grabbed a small bowl

and filled it with milk. "There, take that up to your room and give it to your cat," her mum said. Carefully going up the stairs, she finally made it to her room. "Here kitty kitty," she called through the door. Immediately, a little black, furry animal went through her legs. "There you go, a fresh bowl of milk." Mayleen watched as Daiyu lapped the milk. She looked so cute when she flicked her tongue out to scoop up the milk. Once she was done, Mayleen cuddled and played with Daiyu. Just playing with the kitten was already satisfying, yet playing and cuddling her pet was very enjoyable. A happy sigh escaped her mouth as Daiyu started playing with a small ball of yarn. Mayleen didn't know how bad the day could be when she had such an amazing, peaceful morning.

Bang, bang, BANG!! The door to Mayleen's house slammed open. At first she thought it was just her sister, coming back after a long, hard day at work. But it wasn't. Mayleen peered down from her bedroom window and was shocked to see a big clump of guards standing outside the door. *Oh no!* Mayleen thought. *What do they want?*

Rushing down the stairs, Mayleen's heart was pounding. She felt like it was going to break out of her rib cage. Finally arriving downstairs, she joined her mother by the door. "Where's your husband?" a guard demanded. He had a low, gravelly voice that was a unpleasant sound. "He stole from the emperor so we have come to take him away." "I don't know where my husband is," her mom replied innocently. "Yes you do." It was a different guard this time. Unlike the first guard, this one's voice was high pitched, like a tiny mouse. Their bodies were different too. The first guards body was bulky, muscular, yet this one's body was not the same. In fact, it was nowhere near it. His arms were thin and he had pale skin that seemed white if you weren't close to him. His uniform hung loosely from his upper body and his pants looked like they were hugging his waist, clinging on for dear life. "Well, if you don't know where your husband is, we might as well search the house to make sure you're not lying," the squeaky guard said stubbornly.

Minutes later, the guards return with Mayleen's dad in their arms. "So you were lying! I knew it!" Squeaker Mcpants, the squeaky guards new nick name, yelled accusingly. "We will be taking him, and you won't get him back." And with that, the door slammed shut.

Sadness washed over Mayleen as she thought of never seeing her dad again. Tears welled up in her eyes but she tried to blink them away."Great," her mom complained. "Now how are we supposed to survive. Your father was the one who provided us with food, water, money. Not even your sister could provide us enough money to get a bag of rice! Now what do we do?" Mayleen thought for a while. It was a challenging puzzle, as the thought of her dad was still there. Then, she got it! "I know!" she exclaimed. "I will go to work as well. Then, I will make money for the family."

“Excellent idea!” her mom declared. “Now, go over to Feng Yang Village square and get a job!” The square her mom referred to was her village square, which was right in the middle of the town. As fast as she could, Mayleen raced out the door and into to centre of the town.

Huffing and puffing, she fell down onto the soft, lumpy dirt underneath her feet. Eventually, Mayleen was able to stand on her feet and walk over to the job stand. The job stand was a small, simple stand that stood on four legs. The legs were covered by a white cloth and above there was a sign that read job stand. Taking a step towards to stand, Mayleen started to think that getting a job was a bad idea. After all, she would have less time to read. *Stop thinking about that* she told herself. *This is for your family.* Taking a deep breath, Mayleen stepped towards the stand. Her stomach tingled. She hadn’t even made it yet! Even though she still had an uncertain feeling about getting a job, Mayleen knew that she had to do it. *For mum,* she whispered, over and over again. Gathering up her courage, Mayleen confidently marched up to the stand and thumped the table.

“Hello, how may I help you?” a short, round man asked. Mayleen noticed the wooden name tag clipped onto his shirt. *Huang,* it read. The letters were carved into the wood, outlined with gold. Under the sunlight, the gold glimmered like a shining star in the night sky. Immediately, she fell in love with it. “Pretty isn’t it?” Huang said following her gaze. Dreamily, Mayleen nodded. “It’s the most beautiful tag I’ve seen,” she replied, still starstruck by it’s beauty. Suddenly, Mayleen felt the urge to possess it. She gasped. *This is not what you came for,* Mayleen silently scolded herself. Putting on a frown, she thumped the table again. “I need a job,” Mayleen told the Huang bitterly. “Now.” “Well,” Huang said, thinking. “All the jobs are taken except for the last job on my list.” “What is it?” Mayleen yelled over excitedly. The stand keeper looked at her in a weird way. He hesitated. Then frowned. “Phoenix keeper,” he muttered gloomily. She gasped. Everyone knew that the Phoenix was a dangerous creature that lived at the bottom of their village. *It’s the last job available,* she told herself. *I need to get it or else I will disappoint mom.* “I want that job,” she declared stubbornly. “Are you sure you want that job?” Huang questioned. “It’s a pretty dangerous job. I don’t think a little girl like you should be working with a Phoenix. In fact, I don’t think any girl should go near it!”

“I don’t care!” Mayleen exclaimed. “I need to get money for my family!” There was an awkward silence. *Was I too harsh?* She wondered worriedly. She looked down sheepishly and stared at her feet. Shuffling nervously, Mayleen felt a bottomless pit of guilt in her stomach. “The emperor’s army just took my father,” she said, quietly. “He had provided us with all our basic needs. Food, water, clothes. Now, he’s gone.” “Oh,” Huang said. Now it was his turn to look down sheepishly. Bending down, Mayleen saw his eyes slowly watering. Huang was going to cry. Slowly, his facial expression curved from sunshine happy to unhappy sad. Suddenly realizing he was about to cry in front of a girl, Huang blinked back the tears and looked up brightly at her again. “Well,

just sign this contract and you'll get the job. But beware, it is dangerous." Mayleen ignored Huang's warning and signed the contract.

"My family will be so happy when they find out that I got a job!" she squealed happily. Once again, she turned around and ran home. But this time, she didn't feel the least bit tired because Mayleen was so excited to tell her mom.

Pounding over excitedly on the door, Mayleen was so happy that she got a job. *Now*, she thought, *I will help my family as much as I can. Like dad.* She was surprised to see her sister at the door. "I heard the news," Mulan said coldly. Although this seems like a horrible welcome for Mayleen, this was actually one of the nicest welcomes her sister's ever done. "I also heard that you went out to get a job," Mulan continued. Mayleen looked closely and she saw that Mulan's eyes were red. "Are you crying?" Mayleen spluttered. She turned around to make sure no one was looking. Hearing someone sniffle, Mayleen turned around again and saw that it was coming from her sister. She couldn't believe it. Her sister, the toughest girl in the village, was actually crying! Finally closing the door, Mayleen held her sister's hand and led her to the table. "What's wrong?" she asked, in a gentle voice that she used when she saw little kids crying in the village. "Dad's gone," Mulan sniffled quietly, so no one would hear.

"And?" Mayleen said, confused.

"Don't you get it? The two of us have jobs now, but we won't be able to provide enough money for the family," Mulan wailed.

"Why's that?" Mayleen wondered.

"Being a Phoenix keeper does not get you that far in life," Mulan said, not crying anymore. Grabbing a nearby tissue, Mulan blew her nose into it. "In fact, it only gives you nine dollars a week!" Mayleen gasped. She was shocked to know that such a dangerous job wasn't a lot of money. "What about your job?" she demanded, extremely mad that her job only gives her nine dollars.

"My job gives me five dollars a week," Mulan said bitterly. She looked highly annoyed that her job was not giving her enough money. "So, even though we have jobs, we can't provide enough money for ourselves," she concluded. Mayleen didn't know if her sister was telling the truth. "Well," Mayleen said stubbornly. "I'll have to find out myself to see if what you say is really true." Realizing she hadn't told her mom that she got a job, Mayleen paused in the middle of the stairs. *Well*, she thought, *she'll just have to know tomorrow.* With that, she ran up to her room and cried herself to sleep.

The next morning, Mayleen woke up feeling quite tired because of the night she had. As she got up from her comfy bed, Mayleen could feel the cold air rushing through her face. Slowly, she made her way to the wardrobe. As usual, it was a cold, grey February day. In five minutes, Mayleen had dressed herself and was ready for the day ahead. She wore her favourite shirt even though it was too cold to wear it. On top of that, Mayleen put on her winter coat to keep warm. She also wore a pair of pants that kept her legs from shivering. Heading downstairs, Mayleen felt confident that she would wow everyone because a girl was the Phoenix keeper. "Oh no!" Mayleen cried out. She had

just realized that she had forgotten to put on socks. Quickly, she went back to her room and grabbed a pair of socks. They were very thin, but Mayleen didn't care. As long as her feet were warm, it was fine. She managed to get bread and water without bumping into anyone but on her way out she found herself face to face with her mom. "Where are you going, young lady?" her mom demanded. Mayleen gulped. Her mom looked like a demon when she was mad. "I'm going to work," Mayleen squeaked, hoping she sounded normal.

"You got a job?" her mom said, surprised. *Oh yeah*, Mayleen thought. *I haven't told her yet.*

"Yeah," Mayleen muttered, hoping her mom would just move aside to let her pass.

"Well, I won't bother you any longer. Go on, Mayleen. Go to work," her mom said, stepping aside. *How odd*, Mayleen thought. *She wouldn't do that normally.* Suspicious, she stared at her mom and slowly walked out the door. She knew something was up, but what?

Brushing away the topic, Mayleen put a smile on her face and walked down the street. She knew that she would be the best Phoenix keeper the world has ever seen.

Grabbing a nearby bucket, she whistled a tune as she made her way to the edge of the town. Mayleen couldn't wait to get started. Though, she had no idea what she was to do.

Finally, after what seemed like a thousand years, Mayleen arrived at the Phoenix pit. A fluttering feeling filled her stomach as she approached the bronze gates. Placing both hands on the door, Mayleen pushed the gates with all her might. After many failed attempts, she managed to make the huge, bronze entrance to open. Although she pushed with all the strength she had in her body, Mayleen only made a little crack between the two gates. "All that work, and all I had done was make the doors open just a little bit," Mayleen sighed, highly annoyed with herself. She didn't want to continue blaming herself so she started thinking about something else. *I wonder how Daiyu is doing without me*, Mayleen said silently. She was so deep in thought that she didn't even notice when she took her first step into the Phoenix pit. She was still in deep thought as she walked deeper into the pit's entrance. Suddenly, Mayleen gasped. She had just realized she was in the Phoenix pit! Looking around, she saw that this place was the opposite of what everyone says it is. Instead of being very dark and gloomy, it was surprisingly bright inside. *It's like being in the sun*, Mayleen thought. How nice it was. It was very nice to be in the hot instead of the freezing cold day that was outside. It was also quite cosy in there. There were chairs along the wall with cushions which were very soft. *How wonderful*, Mayleen thought. *It's like a mini house.* After touring around the front entrance, she finally made it to the staircase. Staring down the spiralling staircase, Mayleen felt very dizzy and started to feel nauseous. "How am I supposed to go down that?" she wailed. Immediately, Mayleen wished that she had magic teleportation powers. Taking deep breaths, she lifted her foot and put it down onto the first step. So far so good. *Only around a THOUSAND to go*, she thought, grumpy that

there was no magic portal that could whisk her away to the Phoenix. Sighing, she walked down the stairs. There was lots to do and lots of stairs. How long would this take?

Mayleen didn't feel very comfortable as she approached the bottom of the Phoenix pit. She felt the urge to go back upstairs to her home. *No, you must get money for the family.* Mayleen forced herself to walk forward but instead of walking towards the Phoenix, she rolled to the Phoenix! Since her legs were so tired from walking down the stairs, they forgot how to move! Bam! Mayleen bumped into something that was quite hard and lumpy. Afraid, she moved back. *What is it?* Mayleen wondered. Looking up, she saw something brown and spikey, the colour of mud. *Could it be?* Mayleen thought. She stepped closer, and closer until she knew what it was. It was the wall! *How silly,* Mayleen scolded herself. *You were afraid of a wall made of rocks! Good job, Mayleen!* Slowly, she got up on her feet and started to walk. At first her legs were weak and wobbled but soon, she regained strength and could walk again. Cautiously tip toeing further, Mayleen could see a big lump of light. *That has to be the Phoenix.* Suddenly, she stopped walking. Mayleen bent down and saw that there was a sign. *Beware of Guang- Ming, the fire Phoenix.* She gulped. Fire Phoenix? Everyone in China knew that fire Phoenix's were the most dangerous types of Phoenix's. Taking deep breaths, Mayleen proceeded her journey, deeper into the pit.

Thunk! Mayleen dropped the bucket she held in her right hand. The sound seemed to echo in the dreaded Phoenix pit. Like the entrance, the bottom of the pit was bright and colourful. Sometimes, she didn't know why everyone thought that this place was dark and gloomy when it wasn't. Squack! *What was that?* Mayleen thought anxiously. *Possibly the Phoenix,* she told herself after she calmed down. Carefully walking over, she couldn't help but notice that there was a small lump in the corner of the pit. What was it?

To be continued...