

# LINDA SUE PARK



YEARLING



## A Single Shard



# CHAPTER

## I

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“Eh, Tree-ear! Have you hungered well today?” Crane-man called out as Tree-ear drew near the bridge.

The well-fed of the village greeted each other politely by saying, “Have you eaten well today?” Tree-ear and his friend turned the greeting inside out for their own little joke.

Tree-ear squeezed the bulging pouch that he wore at his waist. He had meant to hold back the good news, but the excitement spilled out of him. “Crane-man! A good thing that you greeted me so just now, for later today we will have to use the proper words!” He held the bag high. Tree-ear was delighted when Crane-man’s eyes widened in surprise. He knew that Crane-man would guess at once—only one thing could give a bag that kind of smooth fullness. Not carrot-tops or chicken bones, which protruded in odd lumps. No, the bag was filled with *rice*.

Crane-man raised his walking crutch in a salute.



“Come, my young friend! Tell me how you came by such a fortune—a tale worth hearing, no doubt!”

Tree-ear had been trotting along the road on his early-morning perusal of the village rubbish heaps. Ahead of him a man carried a heavy load on a *jiggeh*, an open-framed backpack made of branches. On the *jiggeh* was a large woven-straw container, the kind commonly used to carry rice.

Tree-ear knew that the rice must be from last year's crop; in the fields surrounding the village this season's rice had only just begun to grow. It would be many months before the rice was harvested and the poor allowed to glean the fallen grain from the bare fields. Only then would they taste the pure flavor of rice and feel its solid goodness in their bellies. Just looking at the straw box made water rush into Tree-ear's mouth.

The man had paused in the road and hoisted the wooden *jiggeh* higher on his back, shifting the cumbersome weight. As Tree-ear stared, rice began to trickle out of a hole in the straw box. The trickle thickened and became a stream. Oblivious, the man continued on his way.

For a few short moments Tree-ear's thoughts wrestled with one another. *Tell him—quickly! Before he loses too much rice!*

*No! Don't say anything—you will be able to pick up the fallen rice after he rounds the bend. . . .*

Tree-ear made his decision. He waited until the man had reached the bend in the road, then ran to catch him.

"Honorable sir," Tree-ear said, panting and bowing. "As I walked behind you, I noticed that you are marking your path with rice!"

The farmer turned and saw the trail of rice. A well-built man with a broad suntanned face, he pushed his straw hat back, scratched his head, and laughed ruefully.

"Impatience," said the farmer. "I should have had this container woven with a double wall. But it would have taken more time. Now I pay for not waiting a bit longer." He struggled out of the *jiggeh's* straps and inspected the container. He prodded the straw to close the gap but to no avail, so he threw his arms up in mock despair. Tree-ear grinned. He liked the farmer's easygoing nature.


"Fetch me a few leaves, boy," said the farmer. Tree-ear complied, and the man stuffed them into the container as a temporary patch.

The farmer squatted to don the *jiggeh*. As he started walking, he called over his shoulder. "Good deserves good, urchin. The rice on the ground is yours if you can be troubled to gather it."

"Many thanks, kind sir!" Tree-ear bowed, very pleased with himself. He had made a lucky guess, and his waist pouch would soon be filled with rice.

Tree-ear had learned from Crane-man's example. Foraging in the woods and rubbish heaps, gathering fallen





**T**ree-ear is an orphan boy in a twelfth-century Korean potters' village. For a long time he is content to live with Crane-man under a bridge, barely surviving on scraps of food. All of that changes when Tree-ear sees master potter Min making his beautiful pottery. Tree-ear sneaks into Min's workplace and dreams of creating his own pots someday. When he accidentally breaks a pot, he must work for the master to pay for the damage. Though the work is long and hard, Tree-ear is eager to learn. Then he is sent to the King's Court to show the master's pottery. Little does Tree-ear know that this difficult and dangerous journey will change his life forever.

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**US \$6.99 / \$8.99 CAN**

ISBN 978-0-440-41851-1



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**YEARLING**

A Yearling Book  
New York

RL: 6.2

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Cover art © 2005 by Rick Lieder

COVER PRINTED IN THE USA