

The Eight Immortals II

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

Intermediate
3 min read

Once upon a time there was a poor man, who at last had no roof to shelter him and not a bite to eat. So, weary and worn, he lay down beside a little temple of the field-god that stood by the roadside and fell asleep. And he dreamed that the old, white-bearded field-god came out of his little shrine and said to him: "I know of a means to help you! To-morrow the Eight Immortals will pass along this road. Cast yourself down before them and plead to them!"

When the man awoke he seated himself beneath the great tree beside the field-god's little temple, and waited all day long for his dream to come true. At last, when the sun had nearly sunk, eight figures came down the road, which the beggar clearly recognized as those of the Eight Immortals. Seven of them were hurrying as fast as they could, but one among them, who had a lame leg, limped along after the rest. Before him—it was Li Tia Guai—the man cast himself to earth. But the lame Immortal did not want to bother with him, and told him to go away.

Yet the poor man would not give over pleading with him, begging that he might go with them and be one of the Immortals, too. That would be impossible, said the cripple. Yet, as the poor man did not cease his prayers and would not leave him, he at last said: "Very well, then, take hold of my coat!" This the man did and off they went in flying haste over paths and fields, on and on, and even further on. Suddenly they stood together high up on the tower of Pong-lai-schan, the ghost mountain by the Eastern Sea. And, lo, there stood the rest of the Immortals as well! But they were very discontented with the companion whom Li Tia Guai had brought along. Y

et since the poor man pleaded so earnestly, they too allowed themselves to be moved, and said to him: "Very well! We will now leap down into the sea. If you follow us you may also become an Immortal!" And one after another the seven leaped down into the sea. But when it came to the man's turn he was frightened, and would not dare the leap. Then the cripple said to him: "If you are afraid, then you cannot become an Immortal!"

"But what shall I do now?" wailed the man, "I am far from my home and have no money!" The cripple broke off a fragment of the battlement of the tower, and thrust it into the man's hand; then he also leaped from the tower and disappeared into the sea like his seven companions.

When the man examined the stone in his hand more closely, he saw that it was the purest silver. It provided him with traveling money during the many weeks it took him to reach his home. But by that time the silver was completely used up, and he found himself just as poor as he had been before.

Note: Little field-god temples, Tu Di Miao, are miniature stone chapels which stand before every village. As regards the field-god, see No. 51.

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