



Stories From the Earth and the Stars

The Dragon King

A Story From China



There was once a young man called Li Ching whose greatest wish was to become a wise teacher. He heard tell of a scholar who worked at the top of Dragon Gate Mountain and determined to become one his pupils.

Li Ching set off on his mission by foot. It was high summer and the ground was parched, cracked and hard as bone. The countryside had been suffering a serious drought for the last three years. The crops lay withered and dead in the fields, the flowers had wilted and even the trees seemed to droop. It saddened Li Ching terribly to see his beloved countryside transformed into a barren wasteland.



As he was walking, Li Ching passed a Dragon King temple with a large crowd of people outside. The Dragon King was the god of rain, and the local people felt aggrieved that he had not answered their prayers. Li Ching watched as an angry mob came out of the temple carrying a statue of the Dragon King. They attempted to dump the statue outside in the heat to make him suffer, but various people intervened and a great hullabaloo began. What misery the draught is causing, thought Li Ching as he hurried on past.



Li Ching was so busy worrying about the drought that he forgot to concentrate on where he was going. Dusk began to fall, and Li Ching suddenly realised that he was lost. Ahead of him was a mountain that he didn't recognise. He had come too far now to turn back. There was nothing for it but to climb the mountain and hope to find an inn before it got too dark.

After some time, Li Ching found himself in a deep forest. He was hopelessly lost now and at his wits' end – every twist and turn led him further into the maze of trees.



Li Ching was about to curl up under a tree and wait for when he noticed a flickering light ahead. Overjoyed, he ran towards it and came upon a house. The dwelling stood alone in a small clearing. Strangely, there was no path leading to it. something about the house made Li Ching uneasy but he swallowed his nerves; he needed a place to stay.

Li Ching knocked, and a shrunken old woman answered the door. He begged her to let him stay for the night and warily she agreed. The old woman led him into a small room and laid out a sleeping mat. 'I'm sorry that I have nothing more to offer you,' she said humbly. 'This suits me perfectly,' replied Li Ching.



As soon as the old woman had left, Li Ching collapsed onto his sleeping mat. He fell into a deep slumber, but it wasn't before he was woken by an urgent knocking at the front door. Creeping over to the window, Li Ching saw the old lady letting a young boy into the house, and he overheard everything they said.

'Granny, I have come straight from heaven! I was playing up there and minding my own business when the Emperor God himself gave me an urgent instruction for my father! He is ordered to go up to heaven before dawn to summon the rain.'

'Oh no! What are we to do?' lamented the old woman. 'Your father is away and won't be back for several days. Dawn will break in just a few hours!'



Li Ching shook his head in disbelief. I am in the house of the Dragon King god himself, and these two must be Dragon Mother and Little Dragon. The people's prayers have been answered! But then the door slammed. Little Dragon was walking away, yelling, 'I will tell the Emperor god that my father cannot make the rain tonight.'

'No!' shouted Li Ching, running out after him. 'Please – the drought has ruined the land and the people are desperate.

There must be something we can do!'

'Who are you?' asked Little Dragon in surprise.

'Quiet!' said Dragon Mother. 'I've had an idea...'



Before he knew what was happening, Li Ching found himself dressed up in the crown and robes of the Dragon King.

‘You look just the part!’ sad Dragon Mother. ‘When you arrive in heaven, you must wave this black flag in order to command the gods of wind, thunder and lightning. As long as you have the flag, no one will question you.’

Dragon Mother led Li Ching outside, where Little Dragon was waiting next to a beautiful white stallion. The boy presented Li Ching with a water vase made from white jade, and a branch of willow.



'You will use these to make the rain, but don't forget – one drop in heaven goes a long way on Earth,' Dragon Mother said. 'Listen to Little Dragon. He will tell you how many drops to scatter. Now, climb onto the white horse. He will take you up to heaven.'



Li Chin climbed on nervously, pulling Little Dragon with him, and the stallion soared upwards! The world looked so neat and orderly from above: the square fields, ridged mountains and curling rivers that stretched all the way into the sea.

‘Here we are,’ said Little Dragon.



They had landed in heaven. Li Chin waved his black flag and the weather gods assembled. As soon as he had uttered his commands, they dispersed again. The god of wind blew stray clouds into an enormous bank. Gathered like this, the clouds blotted out the light of the sun and darkness fell on the land below.

‘Now, dip the willow branch into the water vase and shake just one drop down,’ said Little Dragon.



Li Ching did as he was told and then made his final order to the gods of lightning and thunder. A blinding flash of light streamed through the clouds, followed by an almighty crack and a deafen growl of thunder. It was as though the clouds had been ripped apart – a deluge of water fell from the sky and onto the thirsty ground below.

The people rejoiced and ran outside just to feel the rain on their skin again. Meanwhile, the farmers made channels for the water to flow around their withered crops.



It rained for hours. When it finally stopped, there was singing, dancing and much merriment. But Li Ching was not satisfied. If the people are this happy about one measly drop of water, imagine how grateful they will be if I give them more!

He called out to tell the gods that more rain was needed. At once, Little Dragon ran over.

‘No more rain,’ he said. ‘One drop is plenty. My father never scatters any more than that in one go. Your job is done – it’s time to leave.’

Li Ching was enraged. Power had poisoned him and he had quite forgotten that, just yesterday, he had been humbly searching for a teacher.



‘How dare you, a little boy, question me, the bringer of rain!’ he roared. ‘I will do as I please.’

With that, Li Ching grabbed the water vase and tipped it upside down, letting a torrent of water loose on the Earth below. He held it aloft until the last drop had left the vase and grinned with satisfaction as the other gods did their work. It rained ... and rained ... and rained ...

Three days and nights later, the rain finally stopped. Li Ching felt very pleased with himself. He imagined how grateful the people on Earth would be and how they would worship him!



It was time to leave heaven. Li Ching got onto the white stallion and they made their way down. As they got closer to the ground, Li Ching gasped in horror. Everything below them was submerged in water. A flood had swept over the land and turned it into the sea!

The mountains were the only places safe from the flood. Li Ching could see crowds of people snaking up the mountain tracks with possessions piled on their heads.



The horse dropped him off at the top of Dragon Gate Mountain, and Li Ching hung his head in shame and wept bitter tears.

An old man came past and asked Li Ching why he was crying. He explained everything and the old man introduced himself as Wen Chung-tzu – the very scholar whom Li Ching had set out to find in the first place.



‘You have learnt a harsh lesson today, my boy, but don’t be disheartened. Perhaps you meant well, but remember that goodwill alone is not always enough. You allowed a taste of power to overthrow your sense and ignored the advice of a friend. We must think carefully about the impact of our actions, even if our intentions are honest.’

‘It seems I have a lot to learn...’ said Li Ching remorsefully.

‘The journey begins here,’ smiled Wen Chung-tzu as they entered the scholar’s temple.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

