

Five Little Chinamen

Once upon a time, and a very long time ago it was, five brothers lived together in the Great Chinese Empire. Their names were Rice-Seed, Rye-Seed, Pepper-Seed, Bean and Poppyseed. They looked as much like one another as five peas in a pod.

However, each one had his own special skill. Rice-Seed could drink up the sea. If he took one sip on his bamboo-straw, the sea started to go down.

Rye-Seed was impervious to flame. He could stand in the middle of an enormous fire without blinking an eye.

Pepper-Seed could stretch his legs out so far that he could easily cross the Great River with one step.

Bean's body was harder than the hardest stone. Metal weapons broke when they touched him.

Poppyseed spoke the language of animals. All the animals in forest, field and sky were his friends.

They filled their days with happy work. Rice-Seed and Rye-Seed ploughed and sowed their fields from dawn until the sun went down behind the mountains.

Pepper-Seed fished in the Great River.

Bean worked around the house. When the stars came out he stoked the fire and the scent of dinner wafted everywhere.

Poppyseed, who understood the language of the animals, took care of the geese and sheep.

One fine day the neighborhood was aroused by an unusual noise. It was the terrible lord of the land, the cruel and greedy Mandarin.

The great lord had come to hunt. He set his sights on a fawn that was sleeping peacefully at Poppyseed's feet.

"Run to the forest, little deer" shouted Poppyseed when he saw the Mandarin aiming a golden arrow at his little friend. The fawn understood, and quickly vanished in the dense forest.

The furious Mandarin then took after a stag. "Run into the bushes, friend" shouted Poppyseed.

He even warned the rabbits, and thus the Mandarin was unable to take any prey that day.

The bear, the fox, the squirrels – all hid from him.

The Mandarin's anger was boundless. "Throw that accursed child to the tiger! He has warned all the animals to avoid me!" - shouted the Mandarin.

They threw Poppyseed to the tiger, who had a pleasant conversation with him. "Cut off the scoundrel's head!" - raged the Mandarin.

The guards accompanied Poppyseed to the castle prison. "Your head will fall to the dust tomorrow at noon!" - they told him. And that's what would have happened, but...

...that night one of Poppyseed's elder brothers snuck into the prison.

"Run, and I'll stay here in your place. They won't notice the difference for we resemble one another like peas in a pod" - he whispered to his younger brother.

The next day at noon the executioner whacked at the condemned boy's neck all in vain...of course, for it was Bean, whose body resists even the sharpest steel.

The Mandarin grew purple in his anger “Throw him from Dragon Rock!” he ordered “his body will be crushed!” And that’s what would have happened, but...

...that night Pepper-Seed climbed over the castle wall and changed places with his brother. The next day they took him to the top of Dragon Rock....

Pepper-Seed just smiled when they threw him to the depths. He stretched out his long-long legs and landed on his feet.

The Madarin roared and raged “Make an enormous fire, one as tall as the pagoda tower, and burn this fellow to ashes!” he ordered “He’ll die in the fire!” And that’s what would have happened...

But that night Rye-Seed took his little brother’s place.

The next day they set him in the fire.

Rye-Seed stood smiling in the flames. He wasn’t even singed.

“Throw him into the sea. Tomorrow I’ll take him out to Cape Deep in my boat. If he has escaped the flames, he’ll surely drown” screamed the Mandarin. He would have died too, but that night Rice-Seed took his little brother’s place in prison.

The next day they tied a huge rock to his neck and threw him into the sea. The Mandarin smiled victoriously.

Rice-Seed sank to the bottom of the sea, ten-thousand feet down, but as he sank he swallowed water.

By the time the sun had gone down Rice-Seed had drunk up the whole sea. The boats sat on the seabed and the Mandarin and his soldiers tried to escape, but they got stuck in the mud.

Then Rice-Seed spit the sea back out. The waves rolled higher and higher and drowned the boats, the soldiers and the Mandarin.

The rising sun reflected on the mirror of the sea. The Mandarin and his henchmen lay at the bottom of the sea, ten-thousand feet down.

And that’s how Rice-Seed and his brothers escaped death, and lived happily ever after.