

After his host had, with some difficulty, prevailed upon Tripitaka to take the seat of honour, and the necessary polite compliments had been exchanged, Tripitaka enquired, "Sir, could you enlighten us as to why it is so hot in your country, even in the autumn? At dawn we met frost and ice along the road; but after a few hours' travelling, we seemed to meet a wall of heat, and the weather became as hot as it is in mid-summer."

"Ai!" replied the old man shaking his head, "The sad truth is that because we live close to the raging fires of Flaming Mountain, our country has no season but summer." "I trust that Flaming Mountain is not on the way to the West?" enquired Tripitaka anxiously. "I regret that it is," replied the old man. "Only twenty miles from here it blocks the road for two hundred and fifty miles. No one can travel towards the West; even a man of metal would melt if he attempted it!" Tripitaka's heart sank, and he fell silent.

Just then they heard a rice-bun seller crying his wares outside. Monkey went out to buy one, pulling out a hair and saying a quick spell to change it into a penny on the way. When the hawker gave him the bun he jumped, tossing it from hand to hand. "Ouch! I've never felt anything so hot!" The hawker laughed, "You'd better not stay around here if you can't stand heat. Everything's hot here." "But how can you grow rice to make flour for your buns in a climate like this?" Monkey exclaimed. "Oh, that's no problem," the man assured him, "once a year the Immortal Iron Fan comes to put out the flames

for us and make it rain." Monkey stared at him open-mouthed for a moment, then dashed back into the house.

He placed his palms together and bowed to the disconsolate Tripitaka. "Master, I hope I have found a way for us to follow the road to the West, if I may ask the

help of our host?" Tripitaka

looked up hopefully at his clever chief disciple, "Of course Wukong, do whatever is necessary."

Monkey turned to the old man with a courteous bow, "Sir, could you kindly tell me where the Immortal Iron Fan lives?" "Why do you ask?" he countered, surprised.

"I understand from the hawker that the Immortal has a fan that will put out the fire on Flaming Mountain, and I should like to borrow it," Monkey said earnestly. Their host shook his head, "The Immortal Iron Fan



only lends the fan in return for extremely valuable presents, and I fear that pilgrims such as yourselves may not be wealthy enough to offer suitable gifts." "Be that as it may," replied Monkey, "but if you will tell me where I can find the Immortal I should like to ask him."

"Very well," the old man looked serious, "you will have to travel for a month to the southwest, until you arrive at the Palmleaf Cave on Jade Cloud Mountain, there you will find the Immortal Iron Fan. It is a long and dangerous journey, but if you wish to go I will make arrangements for someone to take you there." "I thank you, but I don't need any help," grinned Monkey, "I'll be back in a flash!" and he jumped up and disappeared into the air. The old man rose to his feet in amazement. "O Reverend Sir," he bowed low to Tripitaka, "I see your disciple is an immortal who can ride the clouds and mist. We are honoured to have you in our unworthy home." And from that moment the whole family showered every attention on Tripitaka and his party.

In a few moments Monkey was stepping from the clouds onto Jade Cloud Mountain. He could hear a woodcutter singing in the forest, and guided by his hearty voice soon discovered him up a tall tree. With a polite bow Monkey called up, "May I ask whether this is Jade Cloud Mountain?" "It is indeed, Sir," returned the woodcutter, pausing in his work. "I'm looking for the Immortal Iron Fan who lives in Palmleaf Cave. Do you know where it is?"

The woodcutter's weather-beaten face appeared through the branches. "Palmleaf Cave's a mile or two along that path over there," he pointed to a well-trodden path through the trees, "but the Immortal Iron Fan's moved out," he chuckled, "there's only his wife Raksasi, the one they call Princess Iron Fan there now." "I see," said Monkey, hoping he was in the right place, "d'you know whether they have a Palmleaf Fan that can put out the fire on Flaming Mountain?" "That's right, Princess Iron Fan has it now. We don't need her fan around here so we don't have anything to do with her. Her husband, the Immortal Iron Fan, is the Bull Demon."



Monkey started in alarm. "Oh no!" he groaned to himself, "just my luck! So I'm up against the father and mother of the Red Boy! How in heaven's name am I going to persuade them to lend me the Palmleaf Fan, when I'm the one that defeated their man-

eating son and packed him off to serve the Bodhisattva Guanyin? They're not going to forgive that in a hurry, even though I did do it to save my Master from being eaten."

He thanked the woodcutter, and scratching his head, deep in thought, made his way along the path towards the cave. The scenery was magnificent; the soaring rocks were patterned with mosses and lichens, and topped by gnarled pine trees; cranes called above him, and orioles sang in the willows that grew along the flower-spangled banks of a rushing stream. By the time he came out into a clearing in front of the massive doors of Palmleaf Cave, Monkey had laid his plans.

He knocked boldly, calling, "Elder Brother Bull, please open the door!" After a moment the door creaked open, and a girl holding a flower basket and carrying a rake over her shoulder appeared. Monkey pressed his hands together and bowed, "Young lady, I am accompanying the reverend monk Tripitaka on a pilgrimage to the Land of the West, but our way is barred by Flaming Mountain. Would you be kind enough to announce me to Princess Iron Fan, so that I may request her to loan me the Palmleaf Fan to put out the flames?"

The girl curtsied, "If you will tell me who you are, and where you come from, I will announce you Sir," she replied politely. "I come from the Land of the East, and my name is Sun Wukong," said Monkey, wondering to himself how that information would be received inside the cave.



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