

## The Great Grasshopper Escape

Long ago in China, at the edge of large rice field lived a grasshopper by the name of Ju Long; which means powerful as a dragon. He was quite happy as grasshoppers go, jumping from one long grass stem to another. His favorite thing to do was to jump from a long stem just as the stem, waving in the breeze reached its highest point. It launched him high into the air sending him long distances. One day sitting on a long stem, hoping to catch a breeze, he watched workers in the field. Grasshoppers, able to see in all directions usually make them hard to catch. Today however Ju Long was more interested in the workers than staying alert. SWOOSH! Ju Long suddenly found himself looking out through a haze at a strange sight. Peering down at him through a net were two giant eyes set in an enormous head. A hand inserted itself into the net and before he could escape Ju Long felt himself being grasped and placed in a cage with several other grasshoppers and a cricket. The afternoon wore on and more crickets were added as well as grasshoppers. With evening beginning to fall, workers began leaving the field and the big eyed, large headed creature, carrying the cage followed.

When they arrived in the village the boy entered his home and placed the cage on a shelf. Ju Long asked the others what was to become of them. The grasshoppers stared at him with a frightened look and couldn't answer. Finally, one of the crickets who introduced himself as Wu Chen spoke up. "We crickets are valuable because we can sing. You grasshoppers on the other hand will probably be fed to the fish in the Koi pond." Ju Long and the other grasshoppers gasped in alarm. Panic set in and the grasshoppers jumped about almost tipping the cage over. "STOP!" shouted Wu-Chen. "If you don't calm down we'll all fall off this shelf. Control

yourselves!” Ju Long and the other grasshoppers stopped their mad jumping and stared at Wu Chen. “You’re not the ones being dangled over those hungry beasts in the Koi Pond!” replied Ju Long fiercely. The rest of his companions nodded. This silenced Wu Chen and his fellow crickets temporarily. Just then, the boy creature arrived, and straightening the cage proceeded to put cabbage leaves, bean sprouts and water as well as bits of raw meat for the crickets into the cage. The boy studied them intently, until the grasshoppers became quite nervous. “I think we should get a good night’s sleep and think of a plan in the morning. First however we will have to sing to make our new master happy.” The crickets began rubbing their hind legs together making a beautiful chirping sound. The sound began to soothe even the most nervous grasshoppers and they settled down for the night.

In the morning the boy creature brought them more cabbage leaves and water before leaving for the rice field. “I may have a plan to get you free.” said Wu Chen softly with a wise look. “I have a cousin who may be able to help.” “How could anyone get us out of such a strong cage?” moaned Ju Long. Wu Chen looked at Ju Long with a slight smile and said simply, “Wait and see grasshopper.” Wu Chen gathered the captive crickets for a meeting on the other side of the cage. They listened as Wu-Chen explained his plan. With the meeting over, the crickets began to sing their strange song in a loud voice for several minutes. They stopped momentarily to look out the open window and began again louder still. Suddenly the crickets stopped their singing and stared out the window. In through an open window came four of the largest flying beetles that Ju Long had ever seen. Each beetle had two huge claw-like pincers and looked very menacing. They landed next to the right side of the cage where the crickets gathered to listen to Wu Chen give the beetles their instructions. “Le Chang, the biggest one is in charge. He

knows how to get things done.” Wu-Chen said confidently. “Just Stay out of the way and you will be out in no time.” With that Wu Chen and the other crickets herded the grasshoppers into a corner. Le Chang and his brothers lined up on one side of the the cage where each beetle grasped one of the bamboo bars with a pincer, snapping them in two. When they were done there was an opening large enough for the grasshoppers to escape their prison. Ju Long turned to see the crickets still in the middle of the cage. “What are you waiting for?” asked a puzzled Ju Long. “I think we’ll stay here.” replied Wu Chen. “The boy will take good care of us because he wants us to sing for his family. Besides he thinks we’ll bring them good luck. He’ll feed us and we won’t struggle to find warm homes come winter. Ju Long smiled, nodding his head. He and his new grasshopper friends jumped through the open window looking for the nearest long grass and hoping for a good breeze.

When the boy returned home at the end of the day, he came with more cabbage leaves expecting to see all his captives where he’d left them. He immediately noticed the hole in the cage and not a grasshopper in sight. Surprised that the crickets were still in the cage, he felt very lucky indeed. Quickly repairing the damaged cage he wondered how the grasshoppers could possibly have created a hole in it. Wu Chen smiled at the puzzled look on the boy’s face. That evening the boy hung the cricket cage in a place where all of his family members could enjoy the cricket song. Wu Chen and his friends sang beautifully remembering their part in the great grasshopper escape.