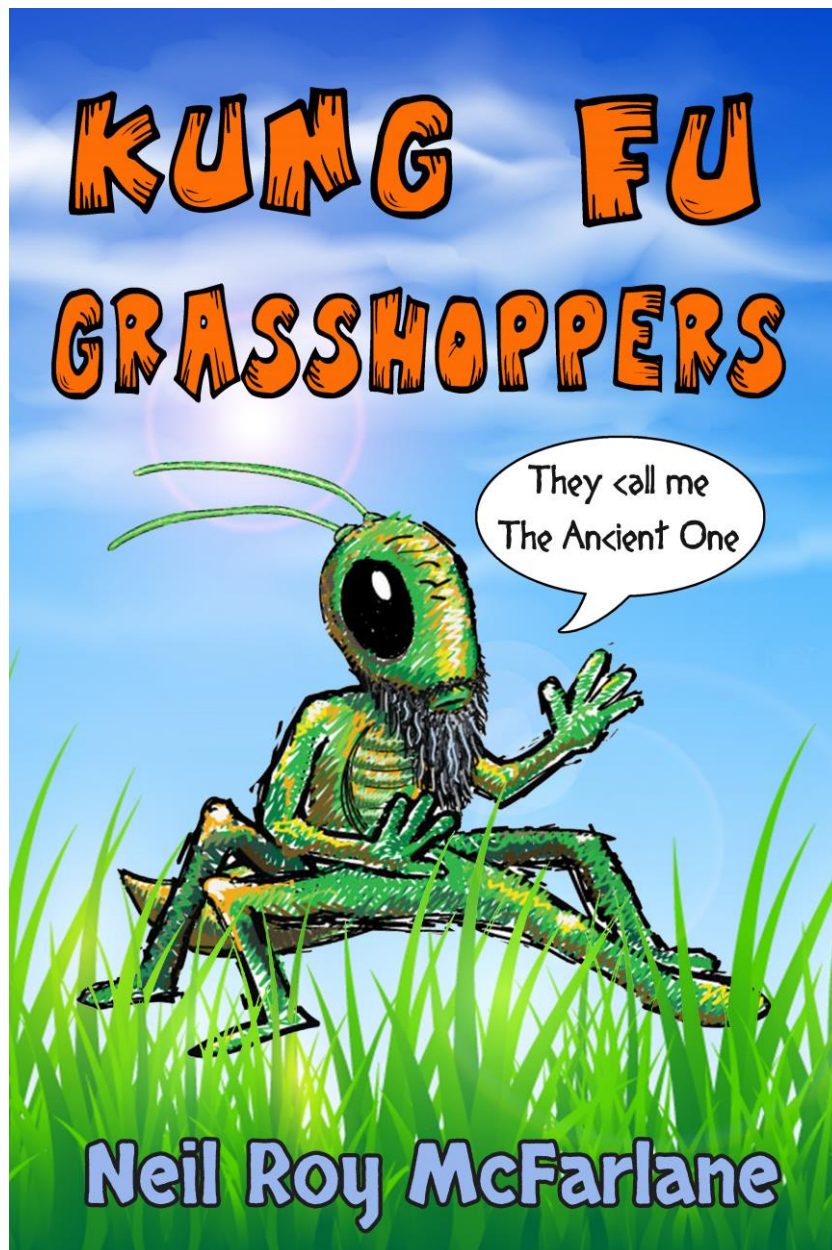


Kung Fu Grasshoppers
by
Neil Roy McFarlane



Just one of twenty-eight stories from the collection:

Quite Possibly The Best Storybook in the World Ever, Maybe
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Kung Fu Grasshoppers

A LONG TIME ago in ancient China, there was a village of grasshoppers who lived peacefully and happily in a lovely valley. There, they spent their days playing and singing and sunbathing, which, as I'm sure you know, is how Chinese grasshoppers love to spend their time.

One day, three grasshopper children went to play in the nearby woods. They had often gone there before and everyone in the village believed that the woods were a sunny and safe place for grasshopper children to play.

But they were wrong because what nobody knew was that a monster had recently come to live in the woods, and that monster caught those grasshopper children and put them in a cage.

When the children didn't return from the woods, a grasshopper search party was sent to look for them. When they found the monster with the grasshopper children in the cage, they said to that monster, "Please release our children."

The monster laughed and said, "Release them? Why, I'm going to eat them unless you grasshoppers bring me other food to eat. Or would you prefer to fight me?" When



Release
them?

Ha Ha
Ha Ha
Ha Ha!

the monster said this, he raised himself up to his full height so that the grasshoppers could all see how big and powerful he was. (In actual fact, he was only the size of a rabbit, but to a grasshopper, that's enormous.) There was no way they could possibly defeat such a mighty beast, so the search party ran back to the village to report the news.

"That monster is a huge, fiercesome creature," they said. "He's far too strong for us. We'll have to do what he says."

So the grasshopper villagers had to stop playing and singing and sunbathing and instead had to work hard all day long to gather food to give to the monster. If you know anything about grasshoppers, you'll know that that's not what they like to do at all. And when they delivered the food, that monster ate it greedily but said that they would have to bring more food the next day and the day after that and the day after the day after that and the day after the day after the day after that and so on and so forth, etcetera etcetera etcetera, otherwise he would eat the grasshopper children. So life in the village changed and the grasshoppers had to spend all their days working hard to feed the monster with no time to enjoy themselves.

"This is terrible," said the village chief. "With every day that passes, we grow thinner and thinner and hungrier and hungrier with all this hard work to feed that greedy monster. I don't think we can keep this up for much longer."

"But what else can we do?" said the children's mothers. "If we stop working to collect food for that monster, he will eat our children."

The village chief sighed but he didn't know what else to do.

It so happened that the next day, two strange grasshoppers came to the village, one a wrinkly old grasshopper and the other a young lady grasshopper who perhaps was the old one's granddaughter. They asked if they might stay the night at the local inn. The innkeeper welcomed them but when he served them supper, the visitors found that the meal was very small and unsatisfying.

"What is wrong, innkeeper?" the old grasshopper asked. "This inn is nice, your welcome is warm, but this is a poor meal you serve us."

"I'm terribly sorry but this is all we have," the innkeeper replied. "You come to this village at a bad time, for, you see, there is a monster in the nearby woods who holds some of our children captive. Every day we must work hard to collect food to feed him and we have no time to enjoy our lives or even to feed ourselves properly. So we grow weaker and weaker with every day that passes and we worry about the future. What will happen to the children if one day we grow too weak to collect food for that monster?"

The strangers listened to the innkeeper's tale and then they retired for the evening.

The next morning, the old grasshopper and the young lady grasshopper set off through the village towards the woods.

One of the villagers, a mother of one of the captive children, had risen early to collect food for the monster. When she saw the visitors heading for the woods, she told them, "Do not go that way, strangers, for that path leads to the woods where there is a terrible monster."

The old grasshopper smiled and said, "We know, but we

feel like a walk in the woods today.”

“Perhaps you aren't afraid for yourself, old one,” said the mother, “but aren't you afraid for your granddaughter? How will you protect her? That monster is a great, fearsome beast and you are only one old grasshopper.”

The old grasshopper simply smiled and replied, “Actually, this is not my granddaughter. She is my accomplice and she can take care of herself.” And with that, the two strangers disappeared into the woods.

The mother ran to tell the other grasshoppers what had happened and the village chief asked, “Why didn't you stop them?”

“I tried,” the mother answered, “but they wouldn't listen to me.”

“We must go after them and try to stop them. If they meet the monster and do not have any food for him, he will eat them, and eat our children too.”

So the villagers gathered together and went into the woods to look for the two strangers. When they reached the monster's lair, the two strangers were nowhere in sight.

“We are looking for two strangers,” the village chief told the monster. “Have you seen them?”

The monster flew into a rage. “How dare you come here bothering me with such questions! Why didn't you bring food for me? I'll teach you a lesson.”

Before the villagers could do anything, the monster scooped them up and placed them in the cage with the children. Now the whole village was captive.

“What are you going to do with us?” the village chief asked.

“I'm going to eat you, of course,” replied the monster.

“Now, let me see—which of you shall I eat first?”

While the monster was deciding, the two strangers, who had been walking around in the woods looking for him, appeared on the scene.

“Ah, so this is where you live,” said the old grasshopper. “And I see you have taken all the villagers captive. I suppose you intend to eat them, do you?”

“That's just what I intend to do,” the monster replied. “I was wondering which one to eat first, and now I've decided.” And he pointed to the young lady grasshopper at the old one's side and licked his lips. “I'll start with that one,” he said. “She looks young and juicy.”

The old grasshopper stepped aside and said, “Go ahead.”

The other grasshoppers looking on from the cage were disgusted by the old one's actions. “Won't you try to protect your granddaughter?” they said. “What a disgrace you are!”

The old grasshopper said, “She is not my granddaughter; she is my accomplice, and she can take care of herself.”

The monster gave a scornful laugh and gnashed his great teeth at the young grasshopper, but she raised her hand and spoke for the first time. “One moment,” she said. “I agree to fight you, but only on one condition.”

“Condition?” the monster snorted.

“If I beat you, you must promise to let the villagers go free.”

The monster could hardly believe his ears. “Beat me?” he sneered. “Beat me? Why I've never heard anything so ridiculous.”

“What's wrong?” she asked. “Are you scared?”

The monster said that of course he wasn't scared and he

agreed to the silly condition. Then he leaped forward to swallow the grasshopper whole. But in a flash, she did a Kung Fu chop on his great nose. The monster staggered back, clutching his nose in pain.

“Wha...? How...?” That monster could barely speak, he was so surprised. Quickly his surprise turned into rage and he slammed his mighty foot down on the young grasshopper, intending to crush her. But she slammed her fist up into the sole of the monster's foot so hard that the monster was thrown backwards and landed on his bottom. (Of course, it could have been worse—he could have landed on someone else's bottom.)

The villagers were amazed. “How did you do that?” they asked. “Who are you?”

The young grasshopper bowed to them and said, “Some who do not know me think me a weak and useless grasshopper. They call me Worthless Wendy. But those in the world of martial arts who know my real identity call me by another name: Fist of Fury.”

The village chief gasped. “I have heard the name but I thought it was just a legend. Are you truly ... Fist of Fury?”

“I am,” replied Fist of Fury.

By this time, the monster had recovered and grabbed hold of the old grasshopper. “You keep away from me or I will eat your grandfather.”

“Fist of Fury will protect the old one,” the village chief said confidently.

But Fist of Fury simply folded her arms and told the monster, “He is not my grandfather; he is my accomplice, and he can take care of himself.”

“We'll see about that,” said the monster, and he gnashed

his teeth at the old grasshopper.

But the old grasshopper held up his hand and said, "One moment. I agree to fight you, but only on one condition."

"Condition?" the monster snorted.

"If I beat you, you must promise to spend the rest of your life collecting food for the villagers."

"Beat me?" the monster sneered. "Why, I've never..."

"Yes, I know—you've never heard anything so ridiculous in your life," said the old grasshopper. "Now—do you agree or not?"

"Yes, whatever," the monster sneered, and then he went to swallow the old grasshopper whole. But in a flash, that old grasshopper raised his leg and did a Kung Fu kick at the monster's great chin, and the monster went flying back and crashed into a tree trunk.

Those villagers were amazed. "How did you do that?" they asked. "Who are you?"

The old grasshopper bowed and said, "Some who do not know me think me a weak and useless old grasshopper. They call me Old Man Jack. But those in the world of martial arts who know my real identity call me by another name: The Ancient One."

The village chief gasped once more. "I have heard the name but I thought it was just a legend. Are you truly ... The Ancient One?"

"I am," replied the old grasshopper.

The villagers were amazed to have two Kung Fu legends helping them and, when the monster recovered, he kept his word and released them. Then he followed them back to the village and spent the rest of the day collecting food



for them. That evening they all had a big feast to celebrate their release and to thank Fist of Fury and The Ancient One for saving them.

The next day, the two Kung Fu legends said goodbye to the villagers. But before they left, they warned that monster that if he ever broke his promise, they would return and make him sorry.

Then the two heroes wandered away into the mountains to continue their adventures, and the monster spent the rest of his life living with the grasshoppers and collecting food for them as he'd promised. The villagers became famous for having their very own monster, and no one else ever dared to cause them trouble again. And actually, the grasshoppers and the monster got to know each other and eventually became friends, so everyone lived happily ever after.

Some stories have a moral and some stories don't. Now that I've told you this story, I'm wondering if it has a moral too. Hmm, perhaps it does. Perhaps the moral of this story is: you should never judge strangers too quickly because you never know what surprises they may have in store for you or what special abilities they may possess. When you meet people for the first time, take things slowly and get to know them before you rush to judge them. Yes, that seems like a good moral, doesn't it?

THE END





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