



The Moon Over Cheung Fu Street

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In a sub-tropical streambed, the one by Cheung Fu Street, there lived a young crayfish. He desperately wanted more of life, and his ambitions unearthed dreams of being more than what fate had in store for him. The crayfish never spoke to anyone, as he lived alone by the small viaduct cutting through the lonely island road, until the one day that he did decide to speak.

Suddenly inspired, he left his hiding spot by the crumbling bridge. Scrambling away from his home and what he knew, he soon discovered how his feet were barely strong enough to cling to the rock and down the endless rapids. It was tough going, but by day's end, he finally stumbled into a large, shallow pool. Catching his breath, he spied a family of tadpoles. They were young and small, milling around with barely a word between them – like strangers.

Moved by something deep within, the crayfish took charge and brought everyone together. Some of the infant frogs murmured protests since they were happy enough just swimming about. They hated anything new, and most were simply timid and afraid. The crayfish, however, was

convinced that he could provide everyone with a better life, but that would only happen if they worked together.

The first thing he did was talk to everyone he could find and encourage them to openly disagree with anything he had to say. This had to be good, so even if some of the tadpoles said things he didn't want to hear, or that they might later regret, the crayfish still tried hard not to take things personally. He then shared his vision of how they would all work together, each one doing his or her share to help the group reach what surely had to be a better life.

"That way," yelled the crayfish over the agitated life in the stream, "everyone wins!"

With such optimism guiding the way, they were all inspired by the vision of a bigger pond with lazy waters. Come to think of it, argued more than a few in their small voices, they could all do with more space. Through patient negotiation and mediation, they all united.

The crayfish went out of his way to understand everyone's fears. Before long, they all agreed the new cause was right and just and good. Feeling himself being the inspiring leader he wished he could become, the crayfish assumed he felt the group's love and admiration.

Working toward the big day, everyone in the pool spent weeks in exercise and preparation. When the final hour arrived, many realized something they could no longer deny but how could they stop now?

They began to notice the crayfish had changed. How it happened was a mystery, but it was plain to see that the crayfish's shell was darker and his eyes glinted in the sunlight with a sharpness that wasn't there before.

As the tadpoles assembled to put their plan into action, they began the journey to leave their crowded home. One by one, they hopped beyond the rocks and shallow rapids, soon faced with the task of crossing a large shelf of exposed rock. The slab, flat and fearsome in the summer sun, proved far too hard for the tadpoles. It didn't matter how much encouragement the crayfish called out from his spot in the shade. The tadpoles eventually began to collapse in the heat. As for the crayfish, he stayed back. It was crucial, he promised, that he stay back to coordinate everyone's move ahead.

Eventually, after the whole morning had passed, all the tadpoles save one were squirming on the rocks. Too hot and tired, they helplessly listened

to the sounds drifting over from the great pool beyond. With each minute, they realized how they had been seduced into this impossible situation.

Clicking his pincers in anticipation, the crayfish scurried over from his spot and found a lone remaining tadpole in the shallows. Merciless and cruel, the crayfish charged and seized her by the tail. Smug, he began to eat and didn't stop until nothing remained of the tadpole.

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A hot wind blew off the hills, gently warming the animals that had risen with the dawn. Weeks of near-cloudless skies warmed everyone and there was peace. By now, the young crayfish was older, plump and generously full. Life had been good to him. He always had what he needed. His body had a few scars but no more than others his age. He was happy and his spot in the stream remained comfortable.

As the wind rolled in, the crayfish stepped out of the water to the base of his rock. His feet stayed wet and cool in the water, and the air and heat dried his shell just right, warming the stiffness out of his joints. He ran his forelegs over his mouth and back, also picking clean around the roughness on his one long, thin claw. Lost in his thoughts, he didn't notice that a young magpie was perched on a fallen branch. She watched him, and since magpies are magpies the young bird eventually hopped closer.

"Morning to the crayfish," she called out, "best he watch, standing in the sun? Might come to harm's way if he not take care."

The crayfish didn't stop preening, working hard to stretch his claw to open wide and loose. Taking his time, he looked up at the large bird. This wasn't the first time he spoke to a magpie

"Morning to you," he said, "I guess we can agree on that. Want to help? You pull my claw so I can open it wide, and I..." His voice trailed off and he waited to see what the bird would do.

"Now there's some fun!" cried the magpie. "Old crayfish got guts!"

Her sharp eyes darted as her head cocked left and right. Her beak opened wide into a grin as she moved closer. "If I help with his claw," she laughed, "the old crayfish will pick the lice from my tail?"

"I guess," sighed the crayfish. "I guess we have a deal."

* * *

The fight left the crayfish exhausted and near dead, hiding under a flat rock in a pool downstream. The magpie had easily hopped up and plucked the crayfish in her beak, squeezing hard and jumping high to the air. The crayfish had twisted and turned to fight but there was nothing he could do. Then, a sliver of the magpie's tongue darted close and the crayfish snapped.

Pinched hard on her soft tongue, the magpie realized her mistake, surrendered and squawked. With beak open she shook her head hard in mid-flight. The crayfish quickly let go and felt himself sail through the air, luckily landing far downstream in a small pool with a shallow eddy.

There was less tree cover, which made the shadows smaller and the hiding places few, but it was good enough and the tired crayfish eventually scrambled under a flat stone in the stream. His claw was now useless as it bumped in the silt next to his body.

The battle with the magpie was fading, but that's competition for you. Everyone wins some, everyone loses some.

The crayfish rested. Fragile, he was a dark shadow under a flat rock. So many threats, he thought to himself. Never-ending Even now, small fry darted close and pecked at his useless claw. With a tired push, he jammed his back against the rock, closed his eyes, and enjoyed the cool slipstreams that wove around like ribbons.

"No one knows I'm here," he thought, the light fading around him.

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Night fell on the stream and the animals that bustled during the day hid from those who hunted at night. Butterflies slept on the underside of leaves, birds snoozed in high branches, and muntjacs huddled in pairs as they stood under thick vines. The toads and geckos were out, picking off crickets and

mosquitos. The bats tirelessly spun in pirouettes and chewed the heads off moths. As for the magpie, she was perched on a branch and staring at the moon.

She couldn't sleep. Her eyes were wide to the cloudless and star-speckled darkness. She listened for a sound or company she might recognize. The water gurgled. As she waited, sounds creeped out from the stream below. A gurgle told her the water had filled a hollow and suddenly spilled over. The scrape of bark against rock said a dislodged branch was making its way downstream.

The magpie felt unsettled. She continued to watch the moon.

"Looks like you could use some company," came a small voice the magpie had never heard before. Turning her head, she saw a forest cockroach quickly darting up the tree. "My name's Paul," chirped the insect, scrambling toward the magpie head-on. "What's yours?"

She eyed the insect as it approached. "Name," she repeated, cocking her head, "a name she don't got."

"Don't have a name?" said Paul, coming level with the beautiful bird. "Is that really true?"

"It must be," retorted the magpie. "Must be because it is." She kept an eye fixed on the insect, deliberately opening and closing her beak.

"Why not, yes," said Paul. Suddenly transformed because now she knew his name it made him real in her eyes.

The two stood still and read the other. To the magpie, Paul seemed more like he belonged in the world of Cheung Fu Stream. How did she ever miss this, she wondered? Her head fell and the world tilted.

"Hey now," said Paul, "slow down slow down! Want to know what my Momma used to tell me? She'd say 'don't run before you can walk'. That's right. Don't run before you can walk. Why don't you give it some thought?"

Unfolding his brown legs and folding them back, Paul took a step closer and looked up at the magpie. "Don't run before you can walk," he repeated and moved even closer still. It may have been a smile that flashed across his jaws, and then he said, "I think I'm about to change your life."

Nothing moved. There wasn't a sound – only the silent moon and the cool light over everything that looked so silver it was blue. And not for the first time did the magpie feel the air escape. Like when she was high up and was suddenly

in a freefall. A dam had burst inside her chest and her toes and thin talons fearfully curled tightly to the branch. So she lunged.

As the horizon tilted she viciously punching a hole in the forest cockroach's chest. He may have been transformed, but just as quickly Paul became a lifeless shell – pecked clean by a magpie high in a tree under the moon.

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This article, story or other document was written by Ran Elfassy as part of the ***Shooting it RAW*** podcast.

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