

A Little Pot of Honey



In the late nineteenth century, there were many foreigners in China. In some areas of the country, they seemed to rule almost every part of Chinese society. Some Chinese people were very unhappy about this and started a special group or society to fight the foreigners. The people in this society were called Boxers because some of them studied Chinese martial arts. Martial arts were their special ways of fighting. They fought against the foreigners from 1899 to 1901. This time in history is known as the Boxer Rebellion.

Time: 1901

Place: A temple in Shandong province, China

The old man walked into his room. The door was already open. Immediately, he saw the small broken pots on the floor and tears of sadness and anger filled his eyes. He was too late.

The pots were not worth anything, of course. But they had contained the last of his honey. His special honey, made by his own bees. It was the honey that had given his students - the Boxers - their strength. If a student ate some of this special honey, he became really strong for a short time. But no amount of strength could stop the guns. His students were now all dead. Now the foreigners took what they wanted.

But the old man would not let them take everything. He had saved one very small pot of honey in his pocket. One day he would give it as a present to the Emperor of China. Now he had to hide it.

The old man heard heavy footsteps outside. It was the foreign soldiers. He put his little pot into a wooden box of small presents that he had saved for the Emperor. He hid the box in the corner of his room and then turned towards the door. He walked into the bright morning sunshine for the last time.

Time: the present

Place: Sweetbourne, a small town in Kansas, USA

Jack Rawlins put his hand up to his black eye as he walked into the kitchen of his home. He knew his eye looked bad.

'Another black eye, son?' asked Evan Rawlins, Jack's dad. He expected Jack to get a few injuries in a school football match, but it had happened too many times lately. He knew why: it was Rex Coulter, the college bully. He was the only one who would want to give Jack a black eye.

'I guess so, Dad. But I did get the winning points!'

Evan Rawlins smiled at his son. Jack was sixteen, almost a man, and he was popular at school. He was a good footballer too, but Evan knew that Jack and all of his friends were being bullied during football matches. Everyone knew that the college bully was Rex Coulter. There was nothing Evan could do. There was nothing the other parents could do either. Boys play rough games. Boy? Rex Coulter was eighteen and he was big. He had short blond hair and a big nose and he must have weighed at least one hundred and ten kilos. He wasn't as good at football as Jack was, but he was

strong and fast. And he liked to hurt people.

Evan put his arm round his son.

'How about doing something to take your mind away from football?'

Jack smiled. His dad bought and sold houses and he often bought everything inside them too. Jack liked the houses, especially when they were old. He loved looking through the things that were in old houses because sometimes, just sometimes, there was something really interesting there.

'You want me to look through some old stuff again, right?' asked Jack.

'Only if you want to, son.'

'When do I start?'

'First thing tomorrow morning. But first, let's look at that eye!'

The house that Jack's father had bought was at the other side of town. An English army officer had built the house in 1930 and his family had lived there ever since. The army officer's granddaughter, now an old lady, had been the last person from that same family to live there.

Jack parked next to a large tree in front of the house. He looked up at the building. For a town like Sweetbourne, it was an old house. And it looked old too. Inside, the rooms were in poor condition. This wasn't unusual in big old houses. But there was one room that was especially unusual. It was the biggest room on the ground floor. It was dark and full of old furniture. It was like a museum. There were old photographs on the wall of soldiers and places in other countries. One photograph showed a smiling army officer standing next to some Chinese men. The Chinese men's hands were tied and they looked unhappy. Were they prisoners? The officer was wearing a British uniform. Was he the man who had built this house? Jack thought so.

The shelves were full of things from China and India - old coins and photographs, old pots and pieces of art and even some dangerous-looking knives. Jack loved these old things and enjoyed looking at them. He could tell that this room contained many unusual and, perhaps, valuable things. Then there, in the corner of one shelf, was a simple little pot that didn't look unusual or valuable at all. Jack looked closer. It was very small, about the size of an egg. It was brown with a small red and black bee painted on its side. Jack picked it up and saw that it had a top which was tightly shut. Nobody had tried to open it - maybe nobody thought it was worth opening. 'Well,' thought Jack, 'my dad owns this now and he told me to look at things, so I'll open it!'

At first the pot was difficult to open, but after Jack tried a little harder, the top came off. Jack looked inside the pot and saw, much to his surprise, that there was a small amount of thick, golden liquid inside. It smelled sweet. He knew at once what the smell was - it was honey! Even though there wasn't much there, Jack couldn't help putting his finger in and tasting it. It tasted delicious, with an unusual, flowery taste that he couldn't recognise. He wanted to finish it all, but he had work to do. He would save it for later.

Jack put the pot down on a shelf and decided to take a walk round the house to see what the garden was like. There was an old tree stump in the garden which he had to pass. There wasn't much space and he hit his leg against the stump. He cried out, more in anger than in pain, and kicked against the stump. He was surprised to see that the stump flew into the air and landed at the other end of the garden.

He went over to look at it. The old dead stump, Jack thought, must have gone soft in the ground. He looked at the stump. It wasn't soft at all. The roots were dead, but they were still there and the stump looked hard and heavy. He looked again and he saw that the roots had been torn out of the ground. Had he done that? Looking again at the size and weight of the stump, Jack guessed that he couldn't even lift it. He tried and found to his great surprise that he could lift it - easily. It was as light as a pillow! He dropped the stump onto the ground and the sound it made, as well as the hole it made in the ground, showed that the stump was very heavy indeed.

'Whoo-hoo!' Jack shouted.

He didn't know how, but he had suddenly become as strong as twenty men, maybe more! Jack went to his dad's car, which was large and new and had a big engine. He put his hands under the front of the car and lifted. It came up as easily as lifting a chair. For the next ten minutes Jack went around the house lifting every heavy thing he found. He was enjoying himself. Then, suddenly, when he tried to lift up a large stone in the garden, he couldn't move it a single centimetre. He tried his best, but it was no good: Jack's amazing new strength had left him as quickly as he'd found it.

He was normal again.

'It was that honey!' Jack said to himself. 'It had to be.'

For some reason, the honey had given him great strength for a few minutes. Jack ran back to find the pot. There it was, still on the shelf. He closed the pot and put it into his pocket. He decided that it would be his secret until he decided what he would do with it. He wouldn't give it to his dad, at least, not yet. Maybe that would be the right thing to do. 'But not just yet,' Jack thought. 'First I'll have some fun with it!'

Jack finished looking at the house and found plenty of other interesting things. But all day he thought about the honey in his pocket. When he got home, he told his father about the house. Dad was pleased when he heard about all the old and unusual things Jack had found in the house. But Jack didn't tell him about the honey.

'You've worked hard today, son,' he told Jack. And he gave Jack a fifty-dollar note. 'Go out and have some fun,' he added.

Jack was feeling good. He had money and he had friends to enjoy it with.

And he had his little pot of honey.

The morning was fine and sunny. It was early summer and Jack was enjoying a walk through the

streets of Sweetbourne with a few of his friends from the football team. They were going to go to the local swimming pool at the sports centre.

They were just going into the sports centre, when they saw a large young man walking towards them. It was Rex Coulter. On his way he pushed into Jack and almost knocked him down.

'Hey, Rawlins! Watch where you're going!' Rex called out.

'You meant to do that!' Jack told him.

'I didn't see a little guy like you' said Rex. 'You need to go to the gym and exercise a bit more if you want me to see you. You're so small I didn't notice you.'

Jack was quite tall and he was healthy and strong too. But next to Rex he did look small. Most people did, especially sixteen-year-old kids.

But Jack was tired of Rex Coulter.

'Why don't you just shut up, Rex?' Jack told him.

Jack's friends went quiet. Had he gone crazy? They looked worried.

Rex laughed. 'Oh, yeah? Do you want to fight me and see? How about it, tough guy? Right now, huh?'

Jack was feeling angry, but he wasn't feeling stupid.

A street fight would just get Jack into trouble. He didn't want that. He wanted to fight Rex, but in some sport with rules. He wanted to make Rex look bad in front of everybody. But what sport could he choose? Jack had an idea.

'Look,' Jack said. 'Everyone knows you're good at wrestling - you're the best at college, right? Well, how about a wrestling match - you against me?'

Rex could hardly believe what he was hearing. 'Are you serious? I'm good - very good. After five minutes with me in a wrestling match, you'll know what "good" means.'

'Oh, I'm serious, believe me,' Jack said.

Jack's friends were trying to stop him, telling him he was crazy. But Jack just put up his hands and called out loudly, 'Look, I'm tired of Rex bullying people. I'll win this wrestling match, just you wait and see.'

Jack turned to Rex. 'So, we do this right and stick to the wrestling rules, OK?'

Rex was amazed. 'OK, my trainer will be the referee. I won't be allowed to kick your teeth in or hit you in your other eye. I'll be happy just to tie your legs around your head and throw you around a

little. You can just worry about avoiding me, OK Shorty?' Rex was laughing now. He was enjoying himself. 'If you can avoid me for three minutes,' he continued, 'I'll shake your hand and apologise. But that's not going to happen. Anyway, how about three o'clock? At the sports centre?'

Jack's friends were all trying to persuade Jack to leave and telling him not to be crazy. But Jack didn't want to stop.

'Three o'clock. I'll be there,' he replied.

Rex left, laughing loudly.

Jack was popular around school and Rex wasn't. Jack's friends thought he was quite mad, but they liked him and didn't want to see him get hurt by Rex Coulter.

Soon the news was everywhere. Jack's friends had made up their minds that they were going to help him.

'Look,' said Eddie Kowalski, Jack's best friend. 'If you get into serious trouble, me and all the guys will jump into the wrestling ring and help - don't worry.'

'Thanks, Eddie,' said Jack. 'That means a lot to me. Now, how about a swim?'

Dad was away looking at a house in the next town. Jack was pleased that Dad didn't know about the wrestling match yet.

He wouldn't hear about it until it was all over. Then, later, he would be very happy to hear that his son had won a wrestling match against Rex Coulter! With the help of that little pot of honey, Jack just couldn't lose. Even if he didn't know about wrestling, he could just pick up Rex and throw him out of the room if he wanted to. And he did want to.

Everybody wanted Rex Coulter to lose a match. It would be good for him to find out what losing was like for a change.

Jack was actually looking forward to it.

At two o'clock Jack got his things and walked towards the sports centre. It was still a fine day. The pot of honey was ready in his pocket. Eddie met him as he got to the high street.

'I've told everybody to come. They'll all be there, Jack.'

'Hey, thanks, Eddie. Thanks very much.'

'You know, Jack, we all think you're crazy to do this, but we love you for it. You know that, right?'

'I know. Thanks.'

'And I meant what I said before - we'll come and help you if you really get in trouble.'

'That's good to know, Eddie. Thanks,' said Jack.

'Hey,' Eddie asked, 'do you want to come in my car? I'm just going to pick up some of the other guys and you can come too if you like.'

'I think I'll walk. I'd like to clear my head a little,' Jack answered. 'I'll see you there, OK?'

'Right, Jack,' said Eddie.

'If you'd had a clear head earlier, you wouldn't be in this mess!' That was what Eddie thought to himself, but he didn't tell his friend. It was too late for that. 'See you later. Good luck!' Eddie said.

Jack was alone. He wanted to be by himself for a while. He was sure the honey would work, but he still felt nervous. After all, Rex was fast and strong - and big! And Jack didn't know a thing about wrestling. He felt in his pocket for the fifteenth time. Yes, it was still there. With the help of the honey, he couldn't lose against Rex.

Suddenly, there was a loud, dull bang and it sounded like it came from nearby. What was it? Jack heard people screaming. He looked up the street and soon saw what it was: a woman was inside a car. The car had hit a wall and smoke was coming from the engine. It looked like the woman couldn't get out. Somebody shouted that a little boy had run into the road and the car had crashed to avoid him. The smell of petrol was everywhere. The woman was screaming. A man was trying to open her door. The car was burning and there was no way out. It was a horrible situation. Where were the firefighters? Nobody knew.

Jack knew what he had to do. He got out his honey pot and opened it. There was only a small amount of honey. He needed some to fight Rex. But he also needed to save this woman. He decided at once that her life was more important and ate all of it. He couldn't take any chances if he was to be sure of saving the woman.

Jack ran over to the car and pushed his way through the crowd of people. He could see fire moving now, from the front of the car towards the woman inside. He had to move quickly. He got to the door, held onto the handle and pulled. The whole door came off and the woman fell out. Jack helped her to run away from the burning car.

Ten seconds later the car exploded.

'You saved my life!' the woman cried. 'But how did you...? The door... I mean... it wouldn't move!'

'I guess I just got the lock in the right position.' Jack looked at her: with her blonde hair and large nose, now dirty with smoke, she reminded him of somebody.

'What's your name, son?' she asked.

Jack told her. Then he hurried off before she could say anything else.

'I'm late for something - I've got to go! Bye!' he shouted.

Jack ran down the street. It was almost three o'clock and he had a wrestling match. But what was he going to do? - he had used up all of his honey! He couldn't fight Rex without it! But wait - maybe, just maybe it was still working. Jack looked around for something to test himself on. He saw a parked car and tried to lift the front of it. It was no good - he just couldn't move it.

Jack was back to his normal strength and he had no more of the honey left.

Rex Coulter was going to break his bones like biscuits in front of everybody. And there was nothing he could do about it.

He could just go home, of course. But Jack didn't consider that for one moment. No, he would have to wrestle Rex Coulter, if only to show his friends that one should never give in to bullies. Not even huge and very strong bullies. He started to walk more slowly.

The sports centre was near now, and many of his friends were already there. In fact, there was already quite a crowd.

'There he is!' somebody cried.

Everyone shouted happily.

'Wow,' thought Jack. 'I really do have a lot of fans. We haven't even started wrestling yet! They should at least wait until I've tried to fight Rex'

Jack remembered that Eddie had told him his friends might save him from real trouble. Maybe he would be OK after all.

Then Jack noticed Rex Coulter. He seemed to be shouting more loudly than anyone else. He was pushing through the crowd towards Jack, holding a mobile phone and speaking to someone.

Rex came up to Jack and hugged him hard. Rex was repeating the words 'thank you, thank you,' again and again.

'Is Rex almost crying?' thought Jack.

Then Jack realised who the woman had reminded him of. And he realised who he had saved from the burning car. Rex Coulter's mother.

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