

MOM'S MISCHIEF

You're No Fun, Mum!

Hongying Yang





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HarperCollins *Children's Books*

First published in China by Jieli Publishing House 2004
First published in Great Britain by HarperCollins *Children's Books* 2008
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd
77-85 Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

The HarperCollins *Children's Books* website address is
www.harpercollinschildrensbooks.co.uk

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Illustrations © Pencil Tip Culture & Art Co 2003

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ISBN-13 978-0-00-727342-3
ISBN-10 0-00-727342-8

Printed and bound in England by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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A VERY SPECIAL MUM

Mo Shen Ma's weekend homework was to write an essay called *My Family is Special*.

Mo put up his hand. "Ms Qin, there is *nothing* special about my family."

"Nonsense," Ms Qin replied. "Every family is special for one reason or another. Think about something that only you know about your family; something really special; something none of your friends know about."

The boy who sat in front of Mo and who always acted a little too smart for his own good was Mao,



better known by his nickname, Monkey. Monkey turned to Mo and whispered, "Ms Qin must want some gossip about our families! She wants us to tell family secrets!"

Ms Qin heard Monkey. She had very sharp hearing and missed nothing that happened in her class. Any pupil who tried to misbehave, or talked in class thinking they would not be caught, would be very sorry...



"Monkey, you were up to your tricks again, weren't you?"

Monkey's "tricks" all involved talking – talking a load of rubbish!



As soon as Mo got home from school, he wrote the title of his essay at the top of a clean piece of paper: *My Family is Special*.

But what could he write about?

There would be plenty of things to write about his father, who was definitely not like an average dad. But Mo couldn't write about his father, because his father



was already a celebrity at the school. Everyone in school knew about Mo's father. Whenever Mo got into trouble, Mr Ma would come to school driving his custom-built SUV – the only car of its kind in the world. And it wasn't just his car that made him famous. Whenever he came to school, Mo's dad got himself into all kinds of hilarious situations. Stories about Mo's dad kept teachers and pupils entertained all year. Like the time he tried to drive his car through the school playground, during a fire-drill; or the time he came to school wearing his Grumpy costume, after his office pantomime of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Then there was the time when he came into school wanting to try out the robot toys he was designing for his company, but the robot toys went completely out of control! No, Mo certainly couldn't write anything about his father for this essay.

Then Mo had an idea! He decided he would write about his mother. Ms Qin was very curious to meet Mo's mother, because she wanted to know whether she was as mischievous as her son and her husband. But Mo's mother had never visited the school – she was too scared of hearing bad things about her mischievous scamp of a son!



Ms Qin had said by “special” she meant something that no one else knew about. Mo thought there were loads of things that other people didn’t know about his mum. To begin with, there was her name!

Mo and his dad always called Mo’s mother Honeybunch. But her *real* name was Blossom. Honeybunch was a nickname Mo’s father made up, because Blossom attracts bees and bees make honey! Mo’s father had once told his wife that even when his hair turned grey and he was covered in wrinkles, he would still call her Honeybunch. And like father like son, Mo told his mother that even when *her* hair turned all grey and she was covered in wrinkles, he would always call her Honeybunch too.

So that was one special thing about Mo’s family, something that no one else knew about.

But Mo needed more, so he decided to interview his father.

Mo asked his dad how he had met his mum. Mo’s dad was always saying that it was the most romantic thing ever, but he’d never told Mo why. Now Mo felt like he was old enough to know how his parents had met, so he asked his dad to tell the story.





"It's a long story—" began Mr Ma.

"Well, make it short, then," said Mo. He might be old enough for a romantic story, but he had his limits.

"Where should I start?" asked his father.

"Start with how you got to know Honeybunch."

Mo's dad gazed up at the ceiling and smiled. But



Mo didn't like seeing his dad with a soppy expression on his face, so he had to look away.

"Your mum and I were both students at Art College. I was in my third year. One day, one of my roommates was talking about a first-year girl. He said she was the prettiest girl in the whole college. You have no idea how many guys wanted to go on a date with her – a whole platoon!"

"How many people are in a platoon?" asked Mo.

"How many people are in your class?" said Dad.

"Forty-eight."

"Yes, that's about right.

Exactly forty-eight other guys wanted to go out with your mum." Mo's dad continued

his story. "Although there were so many guys who wanted to get a date with your

mum, they had no idea how. But I

had a plan. First, I went to a lot of trouble trying to find out what your mum liked. I found out she loved two things: one was eating and the other was laughing.

This was great news for me, because as you know, I am 1) a great chef, and 2) very funny. So I began to



cook delicious food every day in the student kitchen. In the beginning, your mum just ignored me and walked straight past the kitchen to her room. But then the smells from the food I was cooking were just too tempting. She wandered into the kitchen and tried some of the food. She said it was delicious! And the sight of me in a chef's hat and apron made her laugh so much, she was hooked!"

So now Mo had something else to write about. But he still needed more.

Honeybunch was a show-case designer, which was something very few people in Mo's school knew about. Mo had once told his best friends Hippo, Monkey and Penguin that his mum was a show-case designer. They weren't sure what that meant. They thought Mo's mum must design suitcases that were used in films and the theatre.

"Mo, what an interesting job your mum has," said Penguin, not looking very convinced. "What do you know – designing cases for shows!"

"What is there to design? And what are the cases used for anyway?" Monkey had even less idea about what show-case design meant.

But Mo's mum's job had nothing to do with



designing luggage. Actually she designed displays for the shop windows of large department stores to entice customers inside – and those displays were called show cases.

Mo could still remember a time when he was six years old. It was International Children's day and Honeybunch took Mo to a large shopping mall. Honeybunch was going to show-case children's clothes in the shop window. But there were simply too many pieces of clothes to show-case, and she couldn't possibly fit all the mannequins into the shop window.

But Honeybunch wasn't going to let that stop her! Instead of using mannequins, she decided to use real children to model the clothes. She asked Mo and Angel, Mo's neighbour and friend, to be her models for the day. Honeybunch designed the shop window into a T-shaped fashion stage. As soon as the curtain for the stage went up, shoppers in the mall could see Mo and Angel standing on the stage wearing brand-new children's clothes. And every time the curtains went down, Mo and Angel changed into different clothes and Honeybunch designed a different pose for them.

Lots of boys and girls gathered round the shop



window, and begged their parents to buy them new clothes when they saw something they really liked. At the end of the day, nearly all the clothes from the display were sold!

Good show-case designers help stores sell their products – and that was just what Honeybunch had done! So she was a really *special* show-case designer.

That was something else to put in his essay.

Ms Qin was right, Mo thought, my family really is special!



A TALENTED SON

Lately, Honeybunch had been making a lot of phone calls, asking about which brand of piano she should purchase.

"Who are you buying a piano for?" Mo asked.

"For you, of course."

Mo was not impressed: he didn't want a piano! "But why didn't you ask me if I wanted a piano?" he said.

"Daisy has a piano."

Daisy was Mo's cousin, the daughter of Honeybunch's sister. Daisy was three months younger than Mo, but



she was even *more* mischievous than him. Honeybunch's sister had tried everything to make Daisy a well-behaved young lady, including making Daisy have ballet lessons, violin lessons, singing lessons and now... piano lessons.

Honeybunch's sister was always persuading Honeybunch that Mo should do the same, so that he could become a well-behaved young man! When Daisy started to learn the violin, Mo had to learn the violin as well. But shortly after Mo began learning to play the violin, his neck became crooked. Whenever someone asked Mo why his neck was crooked, Mo would blame it on the violin. Honeybunch did want a well-behaved son, but not a well-behaved son with a crooked neck. So Mo stopped having violin lessons. And Daisy's mother stopped Daisy's violin lessons when she could no longer stand the screeching sound of Daisy trying to play the violin!

But Honeybunch's sister was not someone who gave up easily. After the violin plan failed, she was soon plotting something else. She heard that learning traditional instruments could help her daughter get into better schools, so she talked Honeybunch into



sending their kids to learn *erhu*¹ together. But Daisy and Mo both hated learning *erhu*, so they decided to make their *erhu* lesson a nightmare for their teacher. The *erhu* teacher was very patient with them, teaching them over and over again the skills they needed to play well. But Daisy and Mo ignored everything the teacher said and played the way they wanted to. The two children had just three lessons, and the teacher had to cut the lesson short each time to save himself from the torture of hearing them play. After the third lesson, the teacher simply gave up.

Then Honeybunch's sister heard that children who played the piano were more likely to do well in life, because playing the piano helps to develop quick thinking and willpower. She immediately bought a piano for Daisy... and persuaded Honeybunch that she should buy one for Mo.

Honeybunch looked at several pianos and finally bought a shiny black "baby grand" piano for Mo. Mo was very disappointed – he didn't think it was grand at all! It couldn't even play a beat like an electric keyboard!

¹ A traditional Chinese two-stringed instrument

