

In the Year of the Dragon

by H.Q. MITCHELL

pre-intermediate



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H.Q. Mitchell

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CHAPTER 1

"Here we are! Finally in Hong Kong!" said Mr Norris in a deep and heavy British accent. Mr Norris was a tall and thin middle-aged man with strong features.

"What a long flight! All we need now is our luggage. I can't wait to get to our new home," said his tired-looking wife.

Mrs Norris was also tall and thin like her husband, but she had delicate features. Although she was kind and sweet most of the time, she could be reserved at other times.

Just then, Mrs Norris realised that their sons were missing. "Where did our boys go?" she said to her husband as she looked for them. A few minutes later, she spotted them in the far distance.



"Stop following me around, you pest," said Jason to his younger brother, Nicholas.



Jason was a sixteen-year-old boy, and he was quite tall for his age. He had straight blonde hair and blue eyes. He rarely smiled, but whenever he did, it was the brightest smile ever. On the other hand, ten-year-old Nicholas smiled all the time because he was always happy. His red wavy hair, sparkling green eyes and freckles made everyone who met him call him a 'darling'. Somehow his cute and innocent look allowed him to get away with anything.

"I'm not following you," Nicholas replied defensively. "I have to go to the loo too!"

When they got to the door, Jason turned to his brother and sarcastically said, "Oh, I'm sorry. It says, 'Men's Room. No Pests Allowed'. It looks like you'll have to wait, lad!" and walked inside.

Nicholas was angry at his brother's comment. "Smartypants! I'll get him back for that!" he thought. Suddenly, the box of chocolates he was carrying gave him a naughty idea.





When Jason walked out, Nicholas pretended to be in trouble. He clutched his throat with both hands, stuck out his tongue and looked cross-eyed. "Help, Jason," he screamed. "I'm choking!"

Jason was startled at first, but he quickly realised that it was a prank so he gave his brother an angry look. "You're such a child!" he said and walked away.

Nicholas was disappointed, but he didn't give up. He started running after Jason. "I'll get him back next time!" he thought.



When the boys returned to their parents, Mrs Norris said angrily, "Don't disappear again!" She gently pulled Jason by the arm and said to him, "You're older than Nicholas. Behave like it and set the example. Keep in mind that you are also the son of a diplomat and you must act appropriately, whether you like it or not."

Jason raised his voice and said, "Oh really Mother, there's no reason to go on about it."

"Not another word about it, Jason," said his mother. Sometimes she was too hard on him.

"Why is it always my fault?" thought Jason. "I hate being the oldest."

Mr Norris noticed that Jason was upset and winked to comfort him. Then he said, "Let's go. Mrs Pickles is waiting for us outside."

"Mrs Pickles? Who is Mrs Pickles?" asked Nicholas.

"She is our housekeeper," said Mr Norris. "She'll take us home."

"Take us home?" thought Jason. "But home is in England. That's where

my friends are. That's where I know my way around. Not here!" They had been in Hong Kong for less than an hour and he already felt lonely and out of place.

"That must be Mrs Pickles!" said Mrs Norris, as they walked through customs and came out the sliding doors. "I talked to her over the phone yesterday and she told me what she looks like."

Mrs Pickles was a short and fat Australian widow. She was wearing a flowery dress and what the boys later called, 'a silly summer hat'.

Mrs Norris walked towards her and said, "Mrs Pickles, I suppose."

"Yes, that's me!" said Mrs Pickles.

"Welcome to Hong Kong. Oh, aren't you two sweet. How was your flight, darling?" she asked Nicholas and pinched his cheek.

"Fine, thank you," said Nicholas and looked at Jason. He liked the attention she was giving him. Jason just grimaced and walked away. He didn't like Mrs Pickles.

But then again, he didn't like anyone or anything at that moment.

"Did I say something wrong?" asked Mrs Pickles. She wanted to make a good impression.

"Don't mind him, Mrs Pickles. He's tired," said Mrs Norris and gave Jason an angry look.

"Well then, we'd better be on our way," said Mrs Pickles and pointed towards the exit.

"Thank you very much for taking the time to meet us here," said Mrs Norris.

"No worries," said Mrs Pickles. "Your chauffeur is waiting outside. He speaks perfect English."

Just then, Nicholas held out the box of chocolates. "Would you like one?" he asked Mrs Pickles. "The flight attendant gave them to me," he said and giggled.

Mrs Pickles was obviously trying hard to resist. "Well, I shouldn't really ... I'm watching my figure ... but one won't hurt, will it?" she said.





CHAPTER 2

The Norris family were finally on their way to their new home, a penthouse suite in the Mid-Levels.

"This way, please," said JC, the chauffeur, as he opened the door.

"Thank you," said Mrs Norris.

"Uh, will all five of us fit in?" Jason said sarcastically.

"Of course!" JC answered. "Don't worry! Everything and anything is possible in Hong Kong!" When they all went inside, JC said, "Kung hay fat choy!"

Jason looked at Mrs Pickles and then said to JC, "Who are you calling 'fat'?"

"Oh, let me explain," said JC. "That means 'May you prosper' in Cantonese. You see, it's the last week of the New Year celebrations, and it's a popular greeting in Hong Kong."

"Oh, why thank you, JC," said Mrs Norris politely. "Why are you still celebrating the New Year in February?" Jason said rudely. Mrs Norris looked at him angrily and said, "There's a more polite way of asking that, Jason."

"It's OK," said JC. "You see, the Chinese New Year is the most important event of the year. Traditionally it lasts for two weeks. During this time, towns and villages are decorated with coloured lanterns and floral displays. This year the celebrations last until February 19."

"You'll be able to start school after that, boys," said Mrs Norris. The two boys looked at each other. Nicholas was waiting for Jason's reaction, but he



gave none. So Nicholas turned around and said, "I'm excited about starting school."

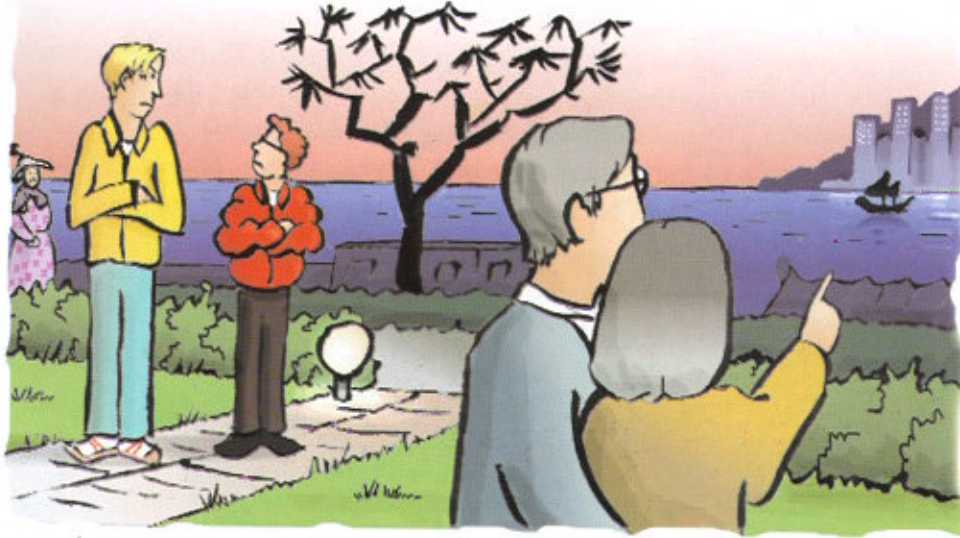
"I'm not," Jason said suddenly and turned to the window. "I won't know anyone," he added quietly. Suddenly Nicholas looked disappointed. He had hoped that his brother would be just as excited as he was.

"You'll make new friends soon," said Mrs Norris. "You will just have to accept the fact that we have moved here. You should be happy that we have the opportunity to live in another country. It's beautiful here. Just look outside!"

"It's an exciting place with a beautiful culture. You'll see," said Mr Norris.

"Appreciate the experience and learn from it," added Mrs Norris.





A short time later, the Norris family and Mrs Pickles arrived at the Mid-Levels.

"Here's our new home, lads," said Mr Norris as they stepped out of the car. "Look at the view! It's just what I asked for. You can see Victoria Harbour from here!"

"How wonderful!" said Nicholas with a big smile. "I'm really excited now!"

"I'm not!" said Jason as he folded his arms and pouted.

"Then, I'm not excited either!" said Nicholas and did the same.

"Why do you have to say what I say?" said Jason and walked away. "You're so annoying."

"Wait for me, Jason!" shouted Nicholas and ran after his brother.



That night, Nicholas was suffering from jetlag and couldn't sleep. He wondered if Jason could sleep, so he went to his room and found the door slightly open. As he entered, he saw Jason counting some money.

Jason was really annoyed. "Don't you knock before you enter?" he said and hid his money.

"What were you doing?" Nicholas asked.

"Nothing," said Jason. "What's wrong?"

"I can't sleep. Can I stay here for a while?" asked Nicholas.

Jason nodded.



In the distance, music could be heard. Nicholas was fascinated. He went to the window and looked below. Some children were celebrating the Chinese New Year. They were dancing and singing in English together. Some of them were dressed up as dragons and lions. Others were playing the drums and gongs.

"What's all that noise?" asked Jason as he walked over to Nicholas. He was annoyed.

"It's a parade, Jason. Look at that big and beautiful dragon!" said Nicholas and pointed to the colourful dragon that was leading the parade.

The dragon looked like a big lizard with fierce fish-like eyes, a long neck and powerful tail. As it swayed side to side down the street, its huge claws made a loud noise.

"I think it looks silly. I don't like it," said Jason as he went to his bed. He had other things on his mind.

Nicholas ignored his brother's remark. He remained at the window pane and carefully watched the parade. Even after the parade was out of sight, Nicholas could still hear the echoes of the chant.

"Dragon one or dragon two,
you know what you must do.
Bring us luck, bring us charm
and keep us away from all the harm."

"Can you hear that, Jason?" asked Nicholas.
"Do you hear the words?"

"No! Goodnight, Nicholas," said Jason.

"Kung hay fat choy, Jason," said Nicholas and smiled as he walked out of the bedroom.

