

ADVANCE READING COPY

# Kung Fu Master

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*Orca currents*

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## Chapter One

Every kid in my grade wants to be my lab partner for one reason and one reason only—I'm Chinese. I don't know who it was, but some jerk started a rumor that Asians are good at math and science. So every time a science project or math homework is due, students desperate to get a good mark suck up to me for help.

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Last year Tyler Mason tried to be my best friend around the same time our science projects were due. A peacock with more fashion sense than common sense, Tyler gets by on his perfect smile and smooth confidence. He likes to pretend he doesn't care about appearances. One time he showed up at school with serious bed head. But I could smell the gobs of gel he had used to style his hair into that artful mess.

Tyler became a minor celebrity at our school because of a YouTube video. He filmed himself flipping a half-full water bottle on top of his pet turtle. His post netted 497,876 views. He brags about this number every day. When he approached me, he claimed he could shoot a video of me that would go almost as viral as his had. All I had to do was help him with his science project. And by *help* he meant “do it.”

Here's the thing. I'm terrible at math and even worse at science. I can't tell the difference between an acid and a base. The only stars I watch are the ones on Netflix. I would tell you that I'm lousy to the power of ten if I knew what the power of ten meant. When Tyler asked me for help, I turned him down because I knew he'd be worse off with me. But then I learned the hard way that no one turns down Tyler Mason. Ever.

In science today Mrs. Hill rolled out a metal cart loaded with half-full beakers, trays and plastic bottles. She had posted instructions for something called "Elephant's Toothpaste" on the smart board behind her.

"All right, class. Today you're in for a treat. We're going to examine catalyst agents. I think you'll like this experiment."

"Why is it called Elephant's Toothpaste?" I asked.

“You’ll see,” said Mrs. Hill. “You’ll be working in pairs.”

I held my breath, hoping she wouldn’t leave the choice to us. The last thing I needed was to spend a class trying not to breathe in Tyler’s body spray. He uses a lot.

Mrs. Hill scanned the class list. “Tyler, you’re with Alanna.”

I sighed with relief. Alanna buried her head in her arms on her desk.

Tyler strutted over and plopped himself down on the stool beside Alanna. “You know how many views my YouTube video has now?”

I think I might have heard Alanna scream into her desk.

“Jon, I’m putting you with Megan,” Mrs. Hill announced.

Megan Reese is the new girl at school. I don’t know much about her other than she is, well, the new girl.

She's only been at St. Thomas More Middle School for a month and she barely talks to anyone. No group has claimed her yet. Not the athletes. Not the gamers. Not the theater kids. She is a loner. But she seems cool.

I looked around. There was Megan, perched on a stool near the back wall. Our gazes locked in a silent battle of wills. I motioned for her to come to my counter, but she shook her head. She pulled her blond hair back in a ponytail and patted the stool beside her. Fine. I shuffled over.

“Hey,” I said.

Megan nodded.

“You good at this kind of stuff?” I asked.

She shook her head. “I’m hopeless. I know enough about science to stay away from it.”

I chuckled. “I’ll beat you to the door.”

“On those scrawny legs? I’m surprised they can even hold you up.”

“So you like looking at my legs?”  
I teased.

“I also like looking at photos of autopsies. You remind me of one of them.”

I did my best impersonation of a zombie, with my eyes rolled back and tongue hanging out. Megan laughed.

Mrs. Hill rolled the cart forward. “These are some of the things you’ll need for the experiment. Come grab a handout and start getting organized.”

She reached under the cart and pulled up a huge plastic jug.

“And, if we have enough time, we’ll step up the catalyst reactions a few notches with this. But that means you have to focus and get your experiment done fast. No fooling around. Focus on the experiment and not on your phones. And no visiting with each other. That

means you, Tyler. In an orderly fashion, go get your equipment, goggles and aprons. *Orderly!*”

Everyone made a beeline for the box of safety goggles, jostling for the most fashionable ones. One girl cheered as she pulled out a pair. Tyler groaned as he held up what looked like the world’s ugliest ski goggles.

Mrs. Hill shouted over the din, “No fighting! You get what you get. And remember to wear your safety glasses at all times. Roll up your sleeves. If you have long hair, tie it back. You should know the routine by now. And pay careful attention to the measurements.”

As the teacher continued to drone on, I grabbed the handout and scanned the list. Megan read over my shoulder. “We need two beakers.”

“I have one already, but we need one more.”

“I’ll get it.”



Megan headed to the equipment cupboard. I tried to decipher the rest of the handout.

“Tyler, the goggles go around your eyes, not your forehead,” Mrs. Hill called out.

Tyler grumbled as he slid the goggles over his eyes. I grabbed some dish soap, along with an eyedropper and a couple of bottles of food coloring. Then I headed back to Megan with my tray of equipment. She skimmed the instructions and checked my haul.

“You forgot the hydrogen peroxide and the yeast.”

“Okay, I’ll be back.”

I hustled to the cart with my beaker. Kids were still assembling their materials. Jessie, the girl who loves unicorns and hates everyone else, had hogged the brown bottle of hydrogen peroxide, carefully pouring it into a beaker while the other kids begged her

to hurry up. I found the yeast, but the jar was nearly empty. I grabbed it anyway, hoping the few grains left were enough for the experiment.

Mrs. Hill strolled over to where my best friend and his lab partner were already setting out their equipment.

“Nice work, Parmeet,” she said. “Don’t forget to stir the liquids before you add the yeast.”

It would take forever to get the bottle from Jessie. I grabbed the big jug of hydrogen peroxide Mrs. Hill had put on the top of the cart. According to the label, the concentration was 30 percent, but I figured it would still do the trick. I poured some of the liquid into my beaker.

At our station, Megan was holding her head in her hands. She shoved the handout at me and said, “Maybe you can figure this out. It is way too confusing for me.”

I stared at the page and then at the smart board. The words were in English, but it seemed like a whole lot of gibberish to me too. But I didn't want to look stupid.

"It says to pour the hydrogen peroxide into a beaker."

Megan held up a narrow tube.

"That's not a beaker," I said. "That's a graduated cylinder."

"Well, that's the only thing that was left in the cupboard."

"Okay. I guess it will have to do."

She placed the tube on top of the plastic tray. I poured the hydrogen peroxide from my beaker into the cylinder. Nothing happened.

"Ooh," Megan said. "Amazing reaction."

"Hold on, hold on. Now we're supposed to add the dish soap and some food coloring."

She added a squirt of red and then some blue. Finally, she poured the dish

soap in. We leaned closer and waited. Nothing. I picked up the tube and swirled the liquids.

“Is this the way it’s supposed to work?” I asked.

“The yeast. We forgot to add the yeast.”

“This was all that was left,” I said, holding up the jar. I tried to sprinkle the yeast into the tube, but most of it landed on the counter.

“Maybe we could use something else,” said Megan. She scanned the sheet. I peeked over her shoulder.

Tyler slid in beside Megan. “Ours is a dud too,” he said, elbows on the table. “What’s happening here, Megs?”

Megan shrugged. “I think we’re doing something wrong.”

“No way. Not with Jon Wong. He’s ‘Mr. Science,’” said Tyler. He always thinks putting air quotes around words is hilarious.

My face grew warm. “We’re supposed to work in partners,” I said. “Not trios.”

“Yeah, well, Alanna is busy. Thought I’d see if one of you wanted to trade your safety glasses out for these cool specs.” He tapped the goggles back up on his forehead. “What do you say, Megs?”

Megan narrowed her gaze at him. “*Megan*. My name is Megan.”

“Whatever.”

“Hey, Jon,” said Megan, trying her best to ignore Tyler. “Maybe we can find a YouTube video and see what we’re missing.”

“Good idea,” I said.

Tyler fished his phone out of his pocket. “What? Mr. Science didn’t think of that first?”

Megan grabbed Tyler’s phone and tapped the screen a few times. Then she set his phone on the tray so we could all see the scientist pouring liquid into a tube.

“Yeah, we added the dish soap. And the food coloring. Oh, wait. What’s that?” I asked.

“Potassium iodide,” Megan said, squinting at the screen where the scientist was holding up a bottle and droning on. “Maybe we could use that instead of the yeast.”

“I didn’t see any of that stuff on the cart,” said Tyler.

“Tyler, get back to your own station,” called out Mrs. Hill. “And put your goggles on!”

“Why?” whined Tyler. “I hate these things. They fog up, and they leave red marks on my face.”

“Come here, Tyler. Right now.”

Tyler sighed, pulled the goggles over his eyes and shambled over to Mrs. Hill.

“Maybe there’s some potassium iodide in the cupboard,” I said.

“Cool. I’ll get it,” Megan said, slipping off her stool.

I watched Mrs. Hill reading Tyler the riot act. He had bothered me enough times that I enjoyed it when he got busted.

Megan came back with a little tub. “The video didn’t say how much potassium iodide to use. What do you think? A tablespoon?”

“Sure.”

Megan measured out the white crystals and added them to the cylinder. The liquid instantly turned to foam and began climbing up the tube.

“Whoa!” we both said at the same time.

The multicolored foam shot straight up to the ceiling before raining down on top of our tray and Tyler’s smartphone.

Chaos broke out as kids started screaming. I wiped some of the foam off my safety glasses.

Mrs. Hill rushed over. “What did you guys do? Wait. Did you use the hydrogen peroxide in the jug?”

“Sorry, Mrs. Hill. I didn’t know it was going to do this.”

“That much is obvious, Jon,” she said, scanning the smoking pile of foam now covering our table. “But it still shouldn’t have reacted like this. Did you use anything else not on the list?”

“Um...” I said. “I might have added some...potassium iodide?” I decided not to bring Megan into it.

“*What?*”

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

Tyler plunged his hand into the foam. “My phone! Look at what you did to my phone!” He looked like he was about to drop me.

Mrs. Hill stepped between us. “That’s enough, Tyler. It’s just foam. You can wipe it off.”



“The stuff is on my screen. If you wrecked my phone, Wongie, you’re going to pay.”

“Tyler, get back to your station. Jon, clean up this mess. Megan, can you help? I have to call maintenance.”

“Yes, Mrs. Hill,” Megan said. She went to grab some paper towels from the dispenser by the classroom door. When she came back to our station she whispered, “Thank you.”

“No problem,” I said.

Well, one problem. Tyler. He was glaring at me from across the room. He made a slicing motion across his throat.