

The Camel's Back

Chan looked out over the field. The dirt trail looked just like a brown ribbon, running over knolls and through dips and puddles. Normally, Chan felt her chest constrict with excitement in this situation, but now there was something else. On top of the anticipation, she also felt guilt as her mother and father's voices rang in her ears: "Your brother's plane won't arrive until 8:00, so we won't be back until around 8:30. Be good while we're gone.... and don't you dare take that motorcycle out without supervision."

"Oh, well," Chan thought. "They'll never know, and what they don't know won't hurt them." She adjusted the chinstrap on her helmet and made sure that her goggles were snug around her eyes. Just before she pushed down on the kick-start, she felt another twinge of guilt. "Maybe I shouldn't," she thought, but before her brain could pursue that thought any further, her leg shot down and her bike's engine roared to life. Her dad had often said that motorcycle engines sounded like purring, and she agreed. However, this wasn't some mild-mannered housecat purring for milk in a saucer. This was a jungle cat, a force of nature to be reckoned with, and its throaty growl filled the air. Once Chan heard that sound, there was no turning back. She gunned the engine and flew across the field.

As she tore down the field, all thoughts of her parents' warning disappeared and were replaced instead by the joy she felt each time she rode her motorcycle. All her problems faded away, and she was left with only the rumbling of the engine, the wind in her face, droplets of mud and water from the puddles, and the splat of the poor occasional bug that wasn't able to avoid her goggles as she sped along. As Chan reached the far end of the field, she turned to follow the trail and saw what her parents and older brother Dante referred to as "the camel's back." Looming large in front of her, the trail traced over two large, back-to-back bumps. Chan always slowed her bike and went over these bumps one after another, but she'd often watched jealously as her parents and older brother revved the engines of their bigger bikes and launched themselves off the first bump and cleanly over the second. She decided in that instant to be jealous no longer, and she twisted the handle's throttle back towards her as she held on for dear life.

Even though Chan was speeding along on her bike faster than she ever had before, a strange and eerie thing happened as she approached the camel's back. Everything slowed down to the extent that the world seemed like it was drowning in molasses, and it seemed like things in her side field of vision gradually disappeared. By the time Chan reached the first hump of the camel's back, it seemed like minutes had gone by, and she could see

nothing else but the trail in front of her. When she finally launched into the air, she felt a floating sensation that brought to mind the astronauts she'd studied in world history. As she cleared the second hump of the camel's back, she felt elated. Chan couldn't wait to show off her new stunt the next time her parents and brother were watching.

She would later wonder whether her cockiness had been her undoing, but for the moment Chan was so wrapped up in her own daydreams that she didn't see the mud puddle that her front tire was headed straight for. She spotted the puddle just as her descent back to earth was complete and her tires collided with it. In a flash, the slow motion sensation she'd been experiencing was gone. Chan's motorcycle slid to the left while she flew to the right. The next thing she knew, she was face down in the pasture's short grass, with the taste of dirt in her mouth. She wasn't sure where her bike was, but she hoped that it, and the breath that had been knocked out of her, hadn't gone far. She turned her head to the side and heaved a sigh of relief as she watched her motorcycle slowly roll on its own into some bushes that helped break its fall. "That certainly wasn't as bad as it could have been," Chan thought.

However, it didn't take Chan long to realize that something was wrong. As she pulled herself to her feet, she felt a sharp, stabbing in her side. The breath that she'd slowly regained while lying on the grass after the crash seemed to be sucked from her with each jab of pain. Worse yet, each step she took seemed to bring the jabbing on anew. Chan had been hurt before. Skinned knees and bruises were commonplace when your family was made up of motorcycle enthusiasts, but this pain wasn't your average, everyday hurt. This was grade-A, 100% serious business, and Chan felt her eyes well up with tears, and her legs threaten to give out from under her with every throb of her chest.

It seemed to take forever, and each step was pure, unadulterated agony, but Chan eventually managed to limp over to her bike. Despite the pain in her chest, Chan was tempted to giggle when she got there. Although she could barely walk, her motorcycle was still running and didn't appear to have a scratch on it. She wasn't sure, but she thought she might have to raise her hand the next time her English teacher asked for an example of irony. If she could ever raise her hand again, that is. In her current state, Chan didn't know how she was even going to raise her arms enough to pick up her motorcycle.

Chan reached forward, grabbed the handlebar closest to her and leaned back in an effort to use her weight to bring the still-running bike onto its tires. As she did so, the pain was so great that she couldn't continue. She collapsed to the ground in a heap before realizing that she would only have to go through the pain of standing up yet again. While lying there and gathering her breath, Chan noticed that the sky was turning a fiery orange and that the sun was creeping behind the trees on the distant hills. With a start, she

glanced at her wrist. It was nearly 7:45! Her parents would be home in less than an hour, and here she was, collapsed in a field with the forbidden motorcycle by her side. It was an incriminating scene, if ever there was one. She could just imagine the punishment she'd receive if her parents knew what she'd been up to. She couldn't ruin Dante's homecoming!

Chan gritted her teeth and got to her feet. Even though she was in a world of pain, she had to get the motorcycle back to the barn and get inside the house before her parents returned with her brother. She grasped the motorcycle and pulled with all of her might. Chan's legs wobbled as she felt that horrible jabbing in her ribs once again, but this time the motorcycle made it all the way up. She knew that she didn't have time to walk the motorcycle all the way back to the barn, and that her only option was to ride it. She swung her leg over the seat and rode away. The anticipation and excitement of her earlier ride was replaced by guilt, shame, and a distinct pain in her ribs every time the bike went over even the smallest bump or rock.

Back at the barn, Chan carefully put her motorcycle back into its spot and wiped down the few bits of dirt that might give her away before limping back to the house, feeling all the while like she was undergoing some kind of cruel torture. After pulling open the door, she made a beeline for the living room sofa and crashed into its cushions. As she lay there, ribs throbbing, she wondered what she should do. Could she keep her secret from her family, or were her ribs so bad that she would need a trip to the doctor, and how would she explain how she got her clothes so dirty? She remembered the last time that she had to visit the doctor, when she was sick with a fever. Her parents had been so sweet, catering to her every need and had even stopped to get her a milkshake on the way home. She doubted whether they would be so sweet this time, given the circumstances.

As thoughts of punishment and guilt raced through Chan's head, the front door burst open and in flew Dante and her parents, faces beaming. Her brother ran to her immediately, scooped her off of the sofa, and gave her the bear hug to end all bear hugs. Chan thought she might pass out from the pain as stars swam before her eyes, and she couldn't help but emit a cry of pain. Her parents' darkened as they began to analyze the situation. She knew that it was no use hiding what had happened on the camel's back, and she drew in a pained breath before squeaking miserably, "Mom, Dad, I have something to tell you, and I don't think that you're going to like it."

1. Why did Chan's dad compare a motorcycle to a cat?

- A. The engine sounded like a cat purring.
- B. They both can have a dangerous side.
- C. A motorcycle can move fast like a cat.

2. Why was that part of the trail called the "camel's back" by Chan's family?

- A. That part of the trail was uneven; so it felt like riding a camel.
- B. That part of the trail had two large bumps like a camel did.
- C. That part of the trail had two sharp curves like a camel's back.

3. Why did everything slow down as Chan approached the first hump on the trail?

- A. She was focused on making the jump and didn't notice the world around her.
- B. She became afraid as she approached the jump and lost all of her focus.
- C. She was daydreaming about showing off her skills to her family later on.

4. When did Chan realize she was seriously hurt?

- A. When she was lying in the grass unable to breathe.
- B. When she finally managed to stand up after crashing.
- C. When she started walking towards her motorcycle.

5. What made Chan notice how late it was after the crash?

- A. She noticed no one else was on the trail with her.
- B. She noticed the trees were casting long shadows.
- C. She noticed the sun was setting behind the trees.

6. What made Chan decide to tell her parents about the accident?

- A. She didn't have time to change out of her dirty clothes.
- B. She realized her pain was too much to hide from them.
- C. She felt guilty and wanted to confess to feel better.

7. What is the main problem in this story?

- A. Chan had to figure out how to get the bike back when she was hurt.
- B. Chan's fall was going to ruin her brother's homecoming if she told.
- C. Chan had to figure out how to hide her hurt ribs from her parents.

8. Why did Chan feel her chest constrict when looking at the dirt trail in front of her?

- A. She was excited.
- B. Her chest hurt.
- C. She felt guilty.

9. Why did Chan make herself pick up the motorcycle even though it hurt?

- A. She didn't have time to walk to the house before her parents got home.
- B. She wanted to make sure her motorcycle was OK after the crash.
- C. She needed to hide the fact she had been riding without permission.

10. What is the main idea of this story?

- A. Motorcycles are very dangerous for kids.
- B. Ignoring caution can lead to big problems.
- C. Stunts should only be attempted by adults.

11. Why was Chan relieved after the accident?

- A. She could see her bike wasn't hurt because it rolled into the bushes.
- B. She got her breath back after it had been knocked out of her.
- C. She finally didn't feel like she was drowning in molasses anymore.

12. What caused Chan's crash on her motorcycle?

- A. She didn't notice the puddle as she came down from the jump.
- B. She jumped her motorcycle over two large bumps in the trail.
- C. She was daydreaming about showing her new skills to her family.

13. What kind of person is Chan?

- A. Careless and dangerous.
- B. Headstrong and determined.
- C. Proudful and risky.

- 14. Why did Chan do the jump even though she'd never tried it before?**
- A. She was tired of being jealous of her family's skills.
 - B. She was going too fast and accidentally flew over the bump.
 - C. She wanted to see if a smaller bike could do the jump.
- 15. How does Chan probably feel about her parents?**
- A. She feels they are unfair and won't let her do things.
 - B. She's afraid of them and how they will punish her.
 - C. She respects them a lot and wants to please them.
- 16. What probably will Chan's parents' first response be when she tells them about being hurt in the accident?**
- A. They will get angry and lecture her.
 - B. They will rush her to the doctor.
 - C. They will be confused about what to do.
- 17. What happened when Chan tried to lift the bike the first time?**
- A. The bike's engine started running.
 - B. She forgot about the pain in her side.
 - C. She couldn't do it and collapsed.
- 18. Why did Chan think she had a good example of irony for her teacher now?**
- A. She was in pain after doing what her parents told her not to.
 - B. Her bike was perfectly fine, but she herself was badly hurt.
 - C. Chan felt like giggling even though she had been injured.
- 19. What did Chan do with her motorcycle before going into the house?**
- A. She wiped off the evidence of her ride.
 - B. She checked the motorcycle for damage.
 - C. She put the motorcycle in the barn.

20. What is the most likely explanation for why Chan's chest hurt?

- A. She was having chest pains from fear and guilt.
- B. She hit the handlebars when she slid in the puddle.
- C. Her ribs were injured from falling off the bike.