I had asthma when I was young, so I never got to play sports much with my father. While my brother and I played a stack of pillows, my father would sit in bed, propped up by a stack of pillows. As I read my comic books, I heard the thump of my brother's football being played beneath our apartment window. In the summer, it was the sound of the slight breeze through the house. In the winter, it was the sound of the snow falling outside. In the fall, it was the sound of the leaves falling from the trees. In the spring, it was the sound of the birds singing.

I was eight, he had taken quickly to American games. When he and Mother were young, they had played the same dances and sports leagues as their white schoolmates—kept separate in Chinatown. (He had met Mother when she tripped him during a co-ed basketball game at the Chinatown Y.) Father was big as a teenager and good at sports. In
And then came the day when the rat invaded our store. It was Eddy who first noticed it while we were restocking the store shelves. I was stacking packages of potato chips when Eddy called me. “Hey, do you know what this is?” He waved a box of donuts. “Yes, it’s donuts.”

Father came out of the storeroom in the rear of our store. Over his back, he carried a huge hundred pound sack of rice. He let it thump to the floor right away.

“Throw that away.”

“Rat droppings,” he said. “Go wash your hands.”

“Yuck.” Eddy flung the droppings down.

While Eddy washed his hands, I helped Father get rid of the evidence. Then he got some wooden traps from a shelf and set them out.

However, the traps were for mice and not for rats. The rat must have gotten a good laugh while it stole the bait and set off the springs.

Then Father tried poison pellets, but the rat avoided them all. It even left a souvenir right near the front door.

Father looked grim as he cleaned it up. “I’m through fooling around.”

So he called up his exterminator friend. Pete Wong. The Cockroach King of Chinatown. While Pete fumigated the store, we stayed with my Aunt Nancy over on Mason, where the cable cars kept me up late. They
always rang their bells when they rounded the corner. Even when they weren’t there, I could hear the cable rattling in its channel beneath the street. It was OK, though, because my cousin Jackie could tell stories all night.

The next day, when we went back home, Father searched around the store, sniffing suspiciously for deadly chemicals. Mother went upstairs to our apartment over the store to get our electric fan.

She came right back down empty-handed. “I think he’s moved up there. I could hear him scratching behind the living room walls.”

Father stared at the ceiling as if the rat had gone too far. “Leave it to me,” he said. He fished his car keys from his pocket.

“Where are you going?” Mother asked.

Father, though, was a man of few words. He preferred to speak by his actions. “I’ll be back soon.”

An hour and a half later he returned with a rifle. He held it up for the three of us to examine. “Isn’t it a beaut? Henry Loo loaned it to me.” Henry Loo was a pharmacist and one of Father’s fishing buddies.

Mother frowned. “You can’t shoot that cannon off in my house.”

“It’s just a twenty-two.” Father tugged a box of cartridges out of his jacket pocket. “Let’s go, boys.”

Mother sucked in her breath sharply. “Thomas!”

Father was surprised by Mother’s objection. “They’ve got to learn sometime.”

Mother turned to us urgently. “It means killing. Like buying Grandpop’s chickens. But you’ll be the ones who have to make it dead.”

“It’s not the same,” Father argued. “We won’t have to twist its neck.”

Buying the chicken was a chore that everyone tried to avoid at New Year’s when Mother’s father insisted on it. To make sure the chicken was fresh, we had to watch the poulterer kill it. And then we had to collect the coppery-smelling blood in a jar for a special dish that only Mother’s father would eat. For a moment, I felt queasy.

“You’re scaring the boys,” Father scolded her.

Mother glanced at him over her shoulder. “They ought to know what they’re getting into.”

I didn’t believe in killing—unless it was a bug like a cockroach. However, I felt different when I saw a real rifle—the shiny barrel, the faint smell of oil, the decorated wooden stock. I rationalized the hunt by telling myself I was not murdering rabbits or deer, just a mean old rat—like a furry kind of cockroach.

“What’ll it be, boys?” Father asked.

Taking a deep breath, I nodded my head. “Yes, sir.”

Father turned expectantly to Eddy and raised an eyebrow.

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Laurence Yep
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THE GREAT RAT HUNT
lesson. However, it was hard to tell this time if it was genuine irritation or his normal reserve.

He merely grunted. "Here. Open this." And he handed me the box of cartridges.

I was so nervous that the cartridges clinked inside the box when I took it. As I fumbled at the lid, I almost felt like apologizing for not being Edwy.

Now, when I got edgy, I was the opposite of Father. I got taller. "How did you learn how to hunt?"

"From your father?"

My father rarely spoke of his father, who had died before I was born. He winced now as if the rat had just nipped him. "My old man? Nah. He never had the time.

I learned from some of my buddies in Chinatown."

He held out his hand.

I passed him a cartridge. "What did you hunt? Bear?"

"We shot quail!" Father carefully loaded the rifle.

I was uncomfortable with the idea of shooting the cute little birds I saw in cartoons. "You did?"

He clicked the cartridge into the rifle. "You have to be tough in this world, boy. There are going to be some times when nobody’s around to help—like when I first came to America."

That was a long speech for Father. "You had your fa-
than anyone."

At the back door of our apartment, he paused and said brusquely. "Now for some rules. First, never, never, never aim the rifle at anyone."

I listened as attentively as I had the disastrous times he’d tried to teach me how to dribble a football, or handle a pop foul. "I won’t," I nodded earnestly.

Father pulled a lever near the middle of the gun.

"Next, make sure the rifle is empty. He let me inspect the breech. There was nothing inside."

"Yes, sir." I said and glanced up at him to read his mood. Because Father used so few words, he always sounded a little impatient whenever he taught me a
He was too busy working. Father stared back down the stairs as if each step were a year. "When I first came here, I got beaten up by the white kids. And when the white kids weren't around, there were the other Chinese kids."

I furrowed my forehead in puzzlement. I handed him another cartridge. "But they were your own kind."

He loaded the rifle slowly. "Yes, they were. The boys born here, they like to give a China-born a hard time. They thought I'd be picked on. No guns. Just our feet and fists. Not like the white kids."

He snapped the last cartridge into the rifle. "And that was why they tried so hard to teach me how to play their games."

I learned how to play the drills, and I made them my friends. "I was the last child to win the award in the elementary school, and I have to have it."

I began to understand the scale of my disappointment. "What was my father doing that was so important to him?"

He closed the lid on the box of ammunition. "I'm not much good at anything."

Lawrence Yap

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THE GREAT RAT HUNT

Feeling more confident, I crept through the kitchen and into the living room. Father was right behind me, with you boy.
He peered under a chair with me and gave me an approving wink. "Give me a hand," he whispered.

In silent cooperation, we moved the chair aside and then shifted the sofa over until it was between us and the rat hole. Bit by bit, Father and I constructed an improvised barricade. We'd built a whole fort together.

Father, conversely, left the lighter things for me to lift, and I was grateful for his thoughtfulness. When we were done, Father got his rifle from the corner where he had left it temporarily.

As we crouched down behind our improvised wall, Father rested the rifle on the floor. "We'll take turns watching," he said, peering over the barrier. There wasn't so much as a whisper in the hole.

While I scanned the hole with intense radar eyes, Father tried to make himself comfortable by leaning against the sofa. It made me feel important to know Father trusted me; and I was determined to do well. In the center of the living room wall was the fireplace, and on its mantel stood Father's trophies like ranks of soldiers reminding me to be vigilant.

We remained in companionable silence for maybe three quarters of an hour. Suddenly, I saw something.
"No," Father panted. "I mean it's rabid." We could hear the rat scurrying above us in the living room. It sounded as if it were doing a victory dance.

Mother made Father empy the rifle. "We'll learn to live with the rat."

As she strove the rifle in the store room, Father tried to regain his dignity. "It may have fleas," he called after her.

Now that my panic was over, I suddenly became aware of the enormity of what I had done. Father had kicked me out of his family.

He drew his eyebrows together as he clinked the shells in his fist. "For what?"

He chuckled as he dumped the cartridges into his shirt pocket. "Well, I ran too. Sometimes it's smart to be scared..."
Mother shook her head. "That rat laughed itself to death."

Father disappeared into the storeroom, and for a moment we all thought Mother had gone too far. Then we heard the electric saw that he kept back there. "What are you doing?" Mother called.

He came back out with a block of wood about two inches square. He was carefully sandpapering the splinters from the edges. "Maybe some day we'll find the corpse. Its head ought to look real good over the fireplace."

Mother was trying hard to keep a straight face. "You can't have a trophy head unless you shoot it."

"If it died of laughter like you said, then I killed it," he insisted proudly. "Sure as if I pulled the trigger."

I turned and said, "That rat was doomed from the start."

I heard my parents both laughing as I hurried away.