

## **A Wish Come True**

Paolo was an avid fan of Tim Ferguson, an Olympic champion in the boxing arena. He admired Tim's muscles in his arms. Like Tim, Paolo wanted to become a great athlete, too, possibly also a boxer. But to be one, he has to stay strong and healthy with big muscles in his arms.

His one wish then was to build muscles in his arms as hard as a rock, and as big as a hen's egg. Every day, he would bend his arm, but there was no sign of a bump.

"I guess my wish won't ever come true," he said sadly to his mother.

"Perhaps there are better ways to build muscle than just wishing," she said. "Why don't you try drinking more milk and orange juice? That may help."

Paolo was willing to try anything that might give him some muscles. At breakfast, he drank milk. At first, he was not fond of it; later on, he grew to like its creamy taste. Also, he felt that he was more energetic in the morning when he had a glass of it. At lunch, he drank a glass of orange juice. His mother said that the juice would help his body defend itself from diseases, so he never missed drinking it. In the evening before going to sleep, he would have another glass of milk.

But even with all the orange juice and milk, Paolo's arm was still flat.

"I guess I will never have any muscles," he said one night. He pushed his dinner plate away and asked for a piece of cake.

Paolo's father looked at the vegetables left on the plate.

"If I were you, I'd finish my vegetables before I eat any cake," he said. "Don't you know that beans and carrots help build more muscles than a cake does?"

Paolo pulled his plate back and ate all the carrots and the beans.

After that, Paolo never failed to eat vegetables. His father encouraged him to eat more at every meal so that his muscles would develop. Other than eating carrots and beans, he ate tomatoes, squash, cabbage, lettuce, pechay, kangkong, and cauliflower.

Day by day, Paolo grew stronger. However, he was not satisfied.

"My muscles look the same," he sighed.

"Why don't you go see your Tita Mina?" his mother asked. "She exercises a lot. She may be able to help you."

Paolo hurried right over to Tita Mina's house. She was on the back porch doing stretches. Paolo watched her closely.

Tita Mina raised both arms straight up overhead as she counted one to eight. Then, she bent over and touched her toes.

"Hello, Tita, what are you doing?" Paolo asked.

"Oh, hello, Paolo! I'm getting ready for my morning workout. Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked.

"Yes, Tita. Can you help me build some muscles? Mother said you might be able to help me."

"Sure. You could join me in my workout."

"I'd love to." Paolo went home and changed clothes for the workout.

Since then, Paolo had joined his aunt in her workout. Every other day, they would do some stretching, run for a few kilometers, and do some exercises to improve their balance and strength. Paolo noticed that his muscles became firmer. However, they did not become as big as he wanted them to.

One night, Paolo and his grandmother were watching TV. In one program, Paolo saw a group of construction workers working on a house. The men were huge and well-built.

"Look, Grandmother!" cried Paolo. "I'd give anything to have muscles like those."

His grandmother put down her sewing.

"Well," she said, "you'll never get them sitting up late watching television shows. If I wanted muscles, I would go to bed with the chickens."

So, Paolo took his grandmother's advice. Every night, he went to bed early and slept for a full eight hours.

Paolo noticed that he felt fresh every time he woke up in the morning. He felt extremely good about himself, and he felt like he could do anything throughout the day without very much effort. Also, people began to notice how well he looked.

One day, when Paolo was feeling very blue about having no muscles, he remembered Mang Juan. Mang Juan was the oldest yet the wisest man in town. Paolo decided to go see him.

Old Mang Juan lived in a tumbled-down house that looked as if it had been there forever. The yard was filled with broken boxes, old chipped boards, and dead tree limbs.

In the middle of the yard, stretched out full-length under a shady tree, was old Mang Juan. He seemed to be asleep.

Paolo hated to interrupt Mang Juan's nap. But he wanted to talk to him. So he coughed and Mang Juan opened his eyes.

"Anything special I can do for you, boy?" Mang Juan asked. He sounded so kind that it was easy for Paolo to pour out his troubles.

Mang Juan looked at Paolo and then settled back again. A honeybee from a nearby hive and a wasp or two buzzed around the old man's nose. He paid no attention to them. Paolo thought he had gone back to sleep.

But finally, Mang Juan spoke again. "Well, now," he said, "you're a good, strong boy. You should get yourself some muscles without too much trouble. If I lie here and think for a while, I may get an idea."

Paolo sat down on a pile of wood to wait for Mang Juan's idea.

Sometime later, the old man said, "While you're waiting, boy, why don't you chop some of this wood that's lying around? The chopping of the wood may help me think."

Paolo was glad to have something to do. He found an old ax and began working.

All afternoon, Paolo chopped while old Mang Juan lay very still. By supertime, Paolo had chopped a neat little pile of wood.

"Very good, boy," said Mang Juan, raising himself up on one elbow. "The trouble is, I haven't quite made up my mind about that muscle. Could you come back tomorrow and do some more chopping? Then maybe I could do a little more thinking."

Paolo said that he would be glad to. He came the next day, but Mang Juan was still thinking. Paolo kept on coming back.

After several weeks, Paolo had chopped all the wood. One day, he had to interrupt Mang Juan's thinking to tell him so. The old man opened his eyes and looked around.

"Boy, you've surely chopped me a fine pile of wood," he said.

"But what about my muscles?" cried Paolo anxiously.

"My goodness! Haven't you got that muscle yet?" said Mang Juan, his eyes twinkling.

Paolo had been so busy chopping wood that he had forgotten to feel his arm for weeks. He bent his arm and saw a bump as big as a hen's egg. Eyes wide with surprise, he touched it and felt that it was hard as a rock.

"Boy, you have got muscle!" said old Mang Juan admiringly.

Paolo could not wait to show his family.

"Oh, thank you, Mang Juan," he called over his shoulder as he raced off.

When Paolo got home, he bent his arm proudly. "Look!" he cried to his family.

"That's what comes from drinking orange juice and milk," said his mother.

"And eating vegetables," said his father.

"And bending over," said his Tita Mina.

"And going to bed early," said his grandmother.

Paolo looked thoughtfully. "And something else," he said. "Mang Juan's formula of patience and hard work."

—From *Roads Here and There* by George Bareo et al.