



MY LAST ASIAN STUDIES CLASS AT SNOWDEN: THE MAGIC OF UNDERSTANDING

BY CAO FENGQING

It is almost the end of the first semester at Snowden International School. Because my Asian Studies course is only a one-semester course, it means today was our last class together. I remember clearly at the very beginning of the year I prayed for the end of the term. I prayed for the passing of every week, every period, and even every minute. I wondered if I could survive the class with 25 students, among whom five are special needs students, and three troublemakers who are almost as challenging.

But during the last period so many important and interesting topics came to my mind that I couldn't decide what to cover! I even wished that I could have one more week! Then I could teach it all. As usual, at the beginning of the class, I distributed folders containing the students' everyday reading materials and worksheets.

"Miss, where is my worksheet?"

Without raising my head, I knew it was Orrin asking me for his worksheet. "How can I give it to you if you didn't hand it to me?" I answered without hesitation.

"Oh! Sorry, Miss. I left it in my folder and I forgot to hand it to you. I am terribly sorry about it but I really finished it."

He continued without giving me a moment to make a response, "Miss, are you happy today?"

Shyann interrupted, "Oh, I know. You are homesick because the Chinese New Year is coming like you told us before. You must miss your family."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"We learned it in class! The Chinese Lunar New Year is also called the Spring Festival and is one of the biggest festivals in China. Your Chinese people get together with your family members just like we Americans do on Christmas."

"You are right," I said. "This year will be the only one I can't celebrate together with them. I miss my son and daughter."

"Oh! No, Miss! We are your sons and daughters. Remember, you told us that your son is 18 years old and your daughter is the same age as us. We love you!"

From the direction of the voice, I realized that it was Ariel who was shouting.

Then a few students responded, "We love you, miss!"

Ariel's voice reminded of me one of the most embarrassing situations I encountered at the beginning of the term. It was Asian Studies class on a Friday and it was also the class for my students to be tested on what they learned during the week. After the greeting, I told them the plan for the period. When I told them that we would have a small test, it was Ariel who stopped me and said rudely, "Miss, how can you give us tests every week? Do you like tests? Can we give you an English test now?"



At her words, my mind went blank. It was my colleague, Mr. Green, who restored order for me by asking her out of the classroom. Later, she unwillingly apologized to me in front of Mr. Green. But today what she said was quite the opposite. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't heard with my own ears!

My inner voice commanded, "Don't cry in front of your students." But my tears disobeyed the order and rolled down my cheeks.

"Look! You've made Miss Cao cry!" Devon, who is in the front row blamed other students.

The more I wanted to control myself, the more tears I felt streaming down my face.

Then Shaanna walked up to me with a guilty look, holding a napkin in her right hand. "Miss, I am sorry I made you sad. Miss, can I hug you?" (I taught them at the beginning of the semester that we Chinese people seldom hug each other unless we are family members.) When we hugged and I forgot about all the trouble they made in class and all of the sharp words they yelled at me. It was amazing that I calmed down after she has hugged me.

"Now, boys and girls, undoubtedly I miss my family just as you said. But I wept for another reason that I can't figure it out myself. Maybe because you are so considerate; maybe because this is the last period or maybe because..."

"Oh! Miss. Will you miss us?"

"Sure," I said.

"Oh, look! She said sure!" The whole class applauded as I had hoped they would the very first day of class! They clapped, however, not because of my excellent teaching or interesting stories, but because of a kind of understanding, respect, and communication that had developed among us.

Then, I had a strong desire to present my farewell speech, which was very early and not well prepared, but I felt I had to. It seemed as if I couldn't survive the day without saying it.

"Now boys and girls, it is five months early for me to say farewell to the United States, Boston, Snowden, and to you, my dearest Asian Studies students. But what I want to say is that I know very well that I will miss Boston, every inch of it. I will miss Snowden, every corner of it. And I will miss my Asian Studies class, every one of you."

The whole class was quiet and listened to me attentively. It was so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop. At that very moment I think I really understood the feelings on their faces. I think they were trying to apologize for their earlier mistakes. They wanted to tell me, "Miss, I don't mean what I say sometimes!" "Miss, I am sorry to cause you so much trouble just because of the bad habits I kept for a long time." "Miss I was rude to you just because nobody cares for me at home."

Looking at the topic of the reading materials I had prepared for them today, "The Magic of Chinese Medicine," I wrote instead on the board, "The Magic of Understanding."