



The Corner Forgotten by Love

by Guo Xiuxia

*TeachTanyaogou Elementary School, Zhuaxi Xiulong Village, Tianzhu County
Gansu Province*

ARSL Sponsor: Raybin Q. Wong Foundation (USA)

Translated by ESS volunteer Bella Li

The wind blew constantly and never seemed to stop. The rapid Jinqiang River glittered under the warm autumn sun, while the snow-capped Maya Mountain surrounded the people and the land here like a mother holding her child. This was how I found the Zhuaxi grassland when I arrived four years ago with my heavy backpack.

Children as uncomplicated and steady as the mountains here greeted me. When I started to clean up my living quarters, they moved closer around me and simply stared at me guilelessly. All of a sudden, a skinny figure lunged forward from the crowd. He picked up the trashcan that I had been too busy to empty and ran towards the school gate.

I called out to him, "Never mind, I will take care of it later." Yet, he acted as if he did not hear me.

"He is deaf and mute," the other kids told me.

On hearing this, my heart skipped a beat. Before I had time to gather myself, he returned with the trashcan. I took a good look at him and thought, "Oh God, here is a pair of eyes as clear as the snowy mountain and able to speak volumes. I have never seen a pair of eyes like these. How could such a pleasant child be deaf and mute?" Perhaps he was embarrassed, as he ran away quickly.

When the class started, the teacher whom I was replacing accompanied me into the classroom. After making some introductions, the teacher turned the children over to me. I looked around and noticed a pair of familiar eyes in the back corner of the room staring at me with joy. It was the deaf boy.

The children told me, "His name is Bai Junan, nicknamed Junjun. He is special. He is not required to answer questions in class or to do homework after school. Our teachers just left him alone."

In the days thereafter, I followed suit by leaving him alone, partly due to the large number of the students in the class. I already had to grade more than 100 workbooks every day because I was teaching two subjects. Besides, the school classified him as a special treatment student, not to be accorded any grade. My load was somewhat reduced this way.

Until one day, my heart was so stricken with pain that I changed my attitude and approach towards Junjun.

At noontime that day, I was on my way to my office, carrying a large stack of workbooks, when I heard a child crying. I looked for a while and finally found him in a damp corner of the schoolyard. It was Junjun! I walked over softly. He raised his head and looked at me with tears in his eyes, sobbing non-stop. I made a few signs asking him, "What happened?"

He pointed to his hair and made signs of “scissors”, “hit” and “laugh”. I came to the realization that a group of boys had cut his hair with scissors, pulled some of his hair out with their hands, shoved him to the ground, and beat him up, before walking away laughing. I checked his scalp by pushing aside his hair and found several scrape wounds. This was outrageous! Meanwhile, my heart froze -- wasn't Junjun, a corner forgotten by love? I was filled with self-condemnation. Immediately I initiated a class meeting, which focused on helping Junjun. After that, following my lead, the children quietly set blame on themselves and began to care about Junjun.

It was during the first time I “talked” to Junjun face-to-face that I discovered that he could make some sounds with his vocal cords. I decided to teach him to learn to talk, even though I knew that this undertaking was going to be difficult. I was positive that his parents must have already tried their best to teach him talk. I began by first teaching him to pronounce “a, o, e” and later taught him to say “Papa, Mama”. After much practice during many ten-minute breaks between classes, Junjun was able to pronounce “Mama” clearly. He almost jumped up crying, while making incoherent signs with his hands in great excitement. This was a language understood only by me.

After some time, he and I could communicate normally. He could understand me by watching the movements of my mouth and eyes and I could grasp the meaning of the unstructured hand signs that he made. Furthermore, he was able to hand in the assignments on time like everyone else (though by copying others' work), completed with good handwriting. There was one more wonder. When the children and I said “Junjun” softly when he was not paying attention, he could miraculously “hear” us and smiled shyly before turning his head away. This must be the sixth sense of love.

The change in Junjun was a big surprise to the teachers, the students, and the parents. Teacher's Day of 2001 shall stay with me for the rest of my life. We held classes for the first half of the day and had the other half of the day off. I had an unusual feeling walking into the classroom. Once there, I was pleasantly surprised and immensely flattered. The children had written on the black board in bold handwriting, “Teacher! You work so hard! Great job!” with flowers drawn around the compliment.

In unison, they said, “We wish teacher Guo a very happy Teacher's Day!”

Slowly, Junjun walked up to me with a broad smile, took a deep bow, and said word by word, “Teacher, you work so hard! Great job!”

The room thundered with applause. I was extremely moved. Later, I asked him who taught him the sentence. He “said” that his classmates taught him and that he had practiced for two weeks.

The love and caring from me and the children kept flowing into a heart once hurt, just as the Jianqiang River kept on flowing. The corner once forgotten by love became the warmest space in the classroom.

In the schoolyard, where children were playing happily, Junjun was engrossed in competing for the ping-pong championship. When he saw me approaching, he beckoned me to play. I smiled and shook my head, “telling” him that I had to grade the workbooks. Love is capable of producing miracles. There are still many more corners forgotten by love in our school. Their worlds may, too, become better with the infusion of love.
