

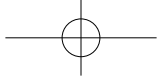
引 子 Prologue

Before summer vacation was over, an Asian family moved into the house across the street from 爱玛's house. The family had a tall boy with black hair and big bright eyes, and he was about the same age as 爱玛. 爱玛 wants to be friends with him.

爱玛 is a 9th grader at Boston High School and will take 中文 as her second language in September. 你好, 中国, and 北京 are the only Chinese words 爱玛 knows. When the new neighbor moved in, she hoped they would be 中国人.

One day, 爱玛 saw a boy playing basketball in front of their driveway, that is great! 爱玛 likes to play basketball too. She ran over to the boy and said: “你好, 你好吗?”





The boy looked a little shy at first, then answered: “你好!”

“So you are 中国人!” 爱玛 couldn't contain her excitement any longer and asked: “Are you from China?”

The boy looked puzzled, then gently nodded his head.

“Can I play?” 爱玛 said, pointing to herself.

The boy looked at 爱玛's finger, which was pointing to her and repeated “Can I play?” He seemed to suddenly understand. He pointed to himself as well and said “大海”, nodding his head.

爱玛 repeated 大海 silently, then she thought—大海 may mean “yes” in Chinese!

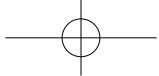
The next day, while 爱玛 was playing basketball in front of her house, the new neighbor boy came over, slowly saying, one word at a time: “Hello, can I play?”

爱玛 answered without any hesitation: “大海!”

...

Over the next few days, 爱玛 and the Chinese boy became friends. They often played basketball together. The Chinese boy, whose name is 大海, felt very lucky to have made a good American friend in such a short period of time after he moved to a new country. Meanwhile, 爱玛 was happy too. She thought it was nice to have a Chinese neighbor from whom she can learn new Chinese words, such as 大海, which probably means “yes”.

Then the first day of school finally arrived.



第一章 特殊^①的礼物

Chapter 1 A special gift

一、你叫什么? What's your name?

爱玛 couldn't believe that she has learned so many Chinese words and sentences in her first 中文课^②. She couldn't wait to show her Chinese to her new friend. "We don't have to gesture and use body language to communicate anymore." 爱玛 was very proud of herself.

"你是哪国人?" 爱玛 sat next to her new friend on the school bus, as she patted his shoulder she asked.

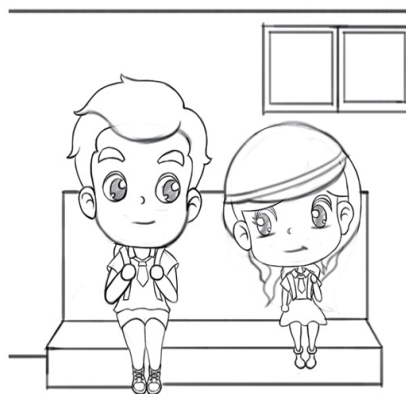
"我是中国人." The boy's answer was exactly the same as the Chinese teacher had taught her.

爱玛 continued: "你叫什么?"

"我叫大海." A very clear Chinese sentence came into 爱玛's ear.

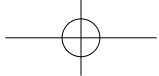
"What? You can't be!" 爱玛 almost jumped out of her seat, shouting in surprise, "your parents named you 'yes'?"

"你不叫大海,大海 means 'yes'." 爱玛 kept saying.



① 特殊 [tèshū]: special

② 中文课 [Zhōngwén kè]: Chinese class



“我叫大海，我叫李大海，and 大海 doesn't mean 'yes'. It means 'big ocean'. 'Yes' in Chinese is '是'。” The boy said firmly. 爱玛 eventually realized that 大海 was not joking, and finally got his name right. What a silly mistake she had made days before!

“你叫什么？你是哪国人？” Then 大海 asked 爱玛.

“你叫爱玛，你是美国人。” 爱玛 answered promptly. But wait, “Is there something wrong?” 大海 shrugged and shook 他的 head.

“Oops, I forgot to change the pronoun.” 爱玛 said again: “我叫爱玛，我是美国人。”

大海 gave 爱玛 a “thumbs up” and said: “我叫李大海，我是中国人. 你叫 ‘Can I play’, 你是美国人.”

爱玛 burst into laughter, then screamed: “No, no, no, no, 我不叫 ‘Can I play’, 我叫爱玛，我是美国人.”

“你叫爱玛，你不叫 ‘Can I play’?” 大海 started laughing too.

After all of that, the two friends finally learned each others' names.

二、生日邀请 Birthday invitation

After half a year, 爱玛 and 大海 had become 非常^①好的朋友. 在中文课上, 爱玛 was always very active and 她的中文 had improved a lot, although 她 constantly made mistakes. Meanwhile, 大海的英文 was getting better and better.

One day, on their way home, 大海 told 爱玛: “爱玛, 今天是我的生日, 我们吃长寿面^②, 你来^③我家吧! I also want to introduce a ‘friend’ to you.”

① 非常 [fēicháng]: very, extremely

② 长寿面 [chángshòumiàn]: long life noodles

③ 来 [lái]: to come

爱玛 didn't understand, so she asked: “什么? 什么? 今天是你的生日? Why didn't you tell me earlier? 我 should have bought a gift for you. What kind of friend, who is he? By the way, what are you going to eat?”

大海 almost started laughing when he saw 爱玛's face, and felt bad for her. 他 said: “There is a huge culture difference between Chinese and Americans when celebrating birthdays. 你们吃蛋糕^①, 我们吃长寿面. Don't worry about the 'gift', just come and join us, OK?”

“What can I say?” 爱玛 thought 大海 was a great friend! But suddenly she remembered that today she had some very hard physics homework, and was not sure if she could go.

“Don't worry about your homework, come to 我家 early so I can help 你. Remember, I am great at physics.” 大海 bragged, grinning.

“Yeah, you are, it's not fair! 我们都 very hard, 可是 it seems 上帝 only 喜欢你. 爱玛 sighed and said: “All right, I will be there as early as I can, and I will eat 又长又‘瘦’^②的面条!”

“什么? 又长又‘瘦’的面条?” 大海 laughed again. 他 wanted to correct what 爱玛 said, but instead 他 said: “好, 好, 好, don't worry! 我 will let 你 know what is 长寿面.”

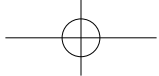
三、长寿面还是长“瘦”面? Long life noodles or long and skinny noodles?

At dinner time, 爱玛 went to 大海家 and saw so many beautiful decorations and immediately smelled the delicious food on the table.



① 蛋糕 [dàngāo]: cake

② 瘦 [shòu]: thin, skinny



爱玛 often eats at a 中国餐馆 with her family, but 她 knows so few Chinese dishes: fried dumplings, fried rice, lo mein, General Tso's chicken which are all Americanized Chinese foods anyway. In other words, she has actually never had real 中国饭 before.

大海的妈妈 came over to say hi to 爱玛 and to tell everybody dinner is ready! 她 gave 爱玛 a big bowl of 面条: “爱玛, please try my hand-made 长寿面.”

爱玛 looked at this big bowl of 面条. The bowl 是蓝色和白色的 with beautiful designs. 面条 was totally different from that she had before in the local 中国餐馆. In this dish, 面条 was at the bottom, with vegetables on top and diced tomato 和牛肉^①. It also had some scrambled 鸡蛋^② and scallions.

爱玛 felt that this was not only a bowl of 面条, but a piece of art!

Well, it is not “长”和“瘦”的面条. Then 她 said to 大海: “You lied! 你 said that we were going to eat long and skinny noodles. But, 这个不是!”

大海 didn't understand: “这是长—寿—面啊!”

Although 大海的爸爸妈妈 didn't know what was going on, everyone agreed with 大海: “是啊, 这是长寿面啊!”

“我 knew ‘瘦’ meant skinny. But 这个面条 is not skinny at all. 为什么叫 ‘长瘦面’ 呢?” 爱玛 still didn't understand.

Ooops, 大家 realized then that 爱玛 was stuck on the meaning of 长寿面.

大海的爸爸 said: “长寿面的 ‘寿’ 是 longevity 的意思, 你说^③的 ‘瘦’ 是

① 牛肉 [niúròu]: beef

② 鸡蛋 [jīdàn]: egg

③ 说 [shuō]: to say

skinny 的意思^①, they are homophones, so they have the same pronunciation but different meanings. There is an implied meaning that we Chinese people have for 长寿面 on our birthdays. We all wish we could have ‘a longer life’. It is a kind of ‘wish’. 懂了吗?”

“And, there is a very interesting story about 长寿面.” 大海的妈妈 also added a few points to the conversation.

她 turned her head to 大海 and said: “大海, please tell 爱玛 the story in English.”

“OK,” 大海 slowly started the story: “About three thousand years ago, in the Western Han Dynasty, there was an Emperor named Wu, and he was very superstitious. 有一天, the Emperor, and his ministers talked about the idea that a person’s face can show how long they would live. Emperor Wu believed this to be true.”

大海 pointed to the middle of the small groove under his nose and said to 爱玛: “Look, right here. 中国人 call it ‘人中(rénzhōng)’, which is a very important acupuncture point in the human body.”

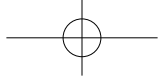
爱玛 followed his instruction and touched her own 人中.

大海 continued: “Emperor Wu believed that people with longer 人中 would live longer. The longer the 人中 is, the longer the life is. There is a particular measure on people’s life: if somebody’s 人中 is one inch long, then they could live for 100 years!”

Hearing this, everybody began to rub their own 人中. 大海的妈妈 said: “It seems that our 人中 are all about one inch long, so we should all live to 100 years old!”

大海 continued his story: “After everybody heard what Emperor Wu said,

① 意思 [yìsi]: meaning



an officer named 东方朔(Dōngfāng Shuò) started laughing. When people asked 他 what 他 was laughing at, 东方朔 explained: "I am not laughing at our Emperor, but at 彭祖(Péngzǔ)."

大海 paused a second and then turned to 爱玛, "彭祖 was the person who had the longest life in Chinese history according to legend. It is said he lived for 800 years."

大海 started laughing and said: "东方朔 said, if 你的人中 was one inch long, you could live for 100 years. Then 彭祖 didn't die until he was 800 years old. Does it mean his 人中 was eight inches long? Can you imagine how long his face was? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha ..."

"That's right, son!" 大海的爸爸 said.

Now everybody started laughing, and 爱玛 finally understood why the story was funny.

To make things clearer, 大海 said: "So, 中国人 have a very unique way to express their desire for longevity. In Chinese, noodle is 面, but 面 has another meaning: face. You know that a noodle could be made very long, so, 中国人 eat 面 on their birthdays; a long noodle means you will live for a long time."

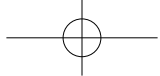
"Wow, that's so interesting!" 爱玛 exclaimed. She now understood what 长寿面 is and what it stands for.

"好了, 好了, let's eat, otherwise the 面 will be cold!" 大海的妈妈 said to everyone.

"祝你生日快乐!" Everybody said happy birthday to 大海.

四、熊猫宝宝 Panda Baby

After dinner, 大海 started unwrapping 他的生日 gifts.



Chapter 7



爱玛 felt bad that she didn't know today was 大海的生日 earlier, otherwise she would have bought him a nice gift. But 大海很喜欢 the hand-made 生日卡^① from 爱玛, he told her: “我很喜欢这个生日卡, 你祝我 become a great physicist. 我 will try my best! Today, 我非常高兴^②. Now it is time to meet my ‘best friend.’”

大海 went to 他的房间, but didn't come back for a while.

“大海, what are you doing?” said 大海的妈妈 as she and 爱玛 went into 大海的房间.

大海的房间很大, but messy. There were a lot of silver metal boards on the floor, and paper and books piled on his desk.

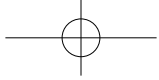
And, there was a “big monster” in the middle of 他的房间, which looked like an unfinished airplane. 大海 appeared from behind the “big monster,” holding a giant plush panda, which was chubby with a cute smile.

Look, 爱玛, 这是我最好的朋友—熊猫宝宝. I have had him since I was a little boy. He is my favorite toy and best buddy. He came with me from 中国.

“What are you doing with him? You just leave him in the corner of 你的房间. Look at all the dust. I think 你的 ‘best friend’ needs a bath now.” 大海的妈妈 teased 大海 while he handed it to 爱玛, then she left the room. 爱玛很喜欢熊猫宝宝. She was very happy to meet such a wonderful friend. She didn't pay attention to how messy 大海的房间 was because she was so

① 生日卡 [shēngrì kǎ]: birthday card

② 高兴 [gāoxìng]: happy



爱玛穿越中国 Emma's Adventures Through Chinese

interested in the “big monster”.

“大海, 这是什么?” 爱玛 asked.

“这个是...” 大海 couldn't find an appropriate word to answer 爱玛的 question.



思考题
QUESTIONS

1. 中国人过生日吃什么 ?

What do Chinese people eat to celebrate their birthdays?

2. 汉武帝是谁 ?

Who is Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty?

3. 什么是长寿面 ?

What are “long life noodles”?