



**Learn English Through
Stories
D Series**

D37

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George Kershaw

Nothing but the Truth



Nothing but the Truth Part 1

By George Kershaw

CHAPTER ONE

Dawn in Bangkok

Hu decided to get up. She couldn't sleep. The first bird of the Bangkok dawn, the cuckoo, started its noisy, morning cry, 'Gow-wow! Gow-wow! Get up! Get up!' Hu could hear the growing noise of the early morning traffic. It was not yet six o'clock.

It was impossible to sleep. She walked over to her window and opened it. The noise and the smell of the big city washed over her. It was still dark. It was a cool January morning, the first day of the spring term.

Hu looked out of the window. The newspaperman arrived on his motorbike and gave his parcel of newspapers to the man at the entrance of the apartment block. The two men laughed, and then the newspaperman waved and drove noisily away to the next apartment block in the Soi, the next street. There was light in the sky now, a soft orange light in the grey dawn.

It was always difficult to sleep the night before the new term, but this time it was even harder. Hu was excited. She would see Marwa and Thomas and Yoshiko again, and that was exciting. She would do less housework and more school work, and that was exciting too.

Hu was seventeen and a good student. She studied at the Bangkok International Academy, an international school for the children of foreign people working in Thailand. It was expensive, but the Chinese oil company, where her father worked, helped her family to pay for her education. She had to study very hard, and all the classes - except her Thai language class - were in English. Hu loved English. Her father wanted her to become a doctor. Her mother said she didn't mind what Hu wanted as long as Hu was happy. But Hu wasn't sure if she wanted to be a doctor, or that she would get good enough results to go to medical school.

Hu liked to work hard, but she was worried about her studies, about her English exam. Today Mr Stanyer, her English teacher, would give out the results of last term's English test. Hu knew she had problems with her English, but she didn't know what the problems were. She loved English - or she had

loved English until she started with Mr Stanyer last term - and she thought she was good at English. Her classmates thought she was good at English too. She helped Marwa with her English homework sometimes, but then Marwa got better results than Hu. Better results with her work!

Hu didn't understand. Mr Stanyer seemed to like her, he always smiled at her. But at the end of last term, after the test, he had asked her to stay after class.

'Come here and sit down,' Mr Stanyer said. Hu sat at his desk in the empty classroom, facing her teacher.

'How was the test, Hu Jian Ming?' asked Mr Stanyer.

'OK, Mr Stanyer. I think I did quite well,' said Hu.

'I hope so. Your father has great hopes for you. He works for an oil company, doesn't he?' Mr Stanyer smiled and looked Hu in the eye.

'He's an engineer with a Chinese oil company.' Hu felt uncomfortable.

'He wants you to take the International Baccalaureate, the IB, doesn't he?' Mr Stanyer continued with questions.

'Well, you must get better results next term. This is just a test, but next term we have the real exam. Then we decide if you can start the IB programme,' said Mr Stanyer.

'Yes, Mr Stanyer.' She noticed Mr Stanyer was sweating, although the classroom was cool.

Mr Stanyer smiled and put his hands on his bald head. 'Perhaps you should do some extra work on your English. Think about it over the holiday.'

'Oh!' said Hu. Her cat, Lao Mao, had jumped suddenly into her room through the open window, surprising her. 'Stupid cat!' said Hu as she picked up Lao Mao. Hu loved animals, she loved nature. Her home city, Wu Xi, was in beautiful countryside, with lakes and low hills in the distance. When Hu's family had to leave China and come to Thailand so that Hu's father could work for his oil company in Bangkok, her mother and father allowed her to bring one thing to remind her of home. Hu chose to bring Lao Mao. Hu liked to talk to him when she was sad, or worried, or feeling a long way from home. Very quietly, she explained her problems with her results for her English studies to the cat.

'If I fail my English test, what can I do?' whispered Hu. Lao Mao said nothing. The noisy cuckoo sang back across the waking city: 'Gow-wow! Gow-wow!'

Hu looked over the apartment blocks to the raised motorway carrying traffic over the city, and the private gardens of the few remaining houses. Bangkok. She missed her own country very much. The sun was rising over the block opposite hers like a big, wet, orange ball. A man in yellow clothes, a Buddhist monk, was walking up the road asking for food. A big Mercedes car came round to the front gate. 'Probably a businessman going to the airport,' thought Hu.

Hu yawned. What would she do?

Something caught her eye in the Soi below. A very large orange and black animal, a squirrel, was running along an electricity line over the Soi. Electricity lines ran across the Soi in a hundred different directions, meeting at the posts at the sides of the street in big balls. Hu thought these balls of electricity lines looked like spaghetti. The squirrels used the electricity lines like motorways, running to and from whatever important business squirrels have to do. Hu looked towards the raised motorway in the distance. All the cars were stopped even now, at half past six in the morning. Another Bangkok traffic jam. Hu's eyes followed the racing squirrel along the line and down into another garden.

There was a knock at the door.

'Jian Ming! Come on, my love. It's a school day today.'

That was her father. He was usually out of bed first. He worked very hard.

'I'm out of bed, father. I'm coming. Don't worry.'

'Don't worry,' thought Hu. 'My father mustn't worry,' she told Lao Mao, her cat. 'He works too hard.'

Lao Mao said nothing. He didn't care.

CHAPTER TWO

New term, old friends

Hu walked up the narrow Soi to school. She felt happy and excited. The early morning sun was bright. It almost hurt her eyes. It was cool and the skies were blue and clear.

There were street restaurants, which had small tables and tiny plastic chairs on the pavements. Hu stepped into the road as she walked past them. City workers sat and ate bowls of Khao Chom, a thick rice soup. They wore their office clothes, and they ate quickly, talking and laughing at the same time. The shop opposite the school was full of students from the international school in their blue uniforms. They were buying drinks and snacks. Some of them had spent two hours or more fighting their way through the Bangkok traffic jams to get to school.

There was a loud noise as a boat raced down the long, the canal at the end of the Soi. Water flew into the air. The smell of the dirty water made Hu feel sick for a moment. 'Everybody is trying to get to work or to school. Everyone is busy, hurrying,' thought Hu. It filled her with excitement.

She walked past the building workers' dark, small homes. They were building another expensive apartment building for rich people to live in, but the building workers lived in their own tiny, dark city. They had built their small world on some waste ground between two tall new buildings, the Royal Luxury Tower and Executive Mansion Apartments. Their homes were made out of old sheets of metal, pieces of wood and useful bits of rubbish. Babies were crying, women were washing clothes, themselves, and children. Hu could see a television, men playing cards, chickens looking for food in the dirt and a small dog asleep in the middle of all the noise. Women and men were walking in silence from their crowded homes to their work. Hu tried to look into their sad, dark eyes. They would breathe and eat the dirt all the long working day, and often late into the night. Hu tried to smile at them but they didn't smile back.

It was wonderful for Hu to see her friends again. They crowded together at the entrance to the school. They were all trying to tell the others what they had been doing during the holidays at once. Thomas Kuhlauf had been home to Germany for Christmas. He had a special German cake, called a stolen. He gave Hu and Marwa and Yoshiko a piece each while they waited for the bell for the beginning of school.

They were still eating Thomas' wonderful cake as they went into the school hall.

Hu found herself sitting next to a new student. He was tall and had blond hair. He had a friendly face, with quick eyes and a ready smile.

'Hi! I'm John Truman from the USA. This is my first day here. What's your name?' said the stranger, smiling. He very politely offered Hu his hand. Hu was surprised, but she smiled and shook his hand.

'I'm Hu. From China... Hu Jian Ming. Your first day?'

'Shhhh!' said Marwa, who was sitting on her other side. 'Mr Grisman! Mustn't talk!'

The school principal, Mr Grisman, walked on to the stage and raised his hands to tell the whole school to be quiet and listen. He was tall and had grey hair. He was wearing dark clothes and a very serious expression. Hu thought he looked silly. He stared at them importantly until there was silence, and then he smiled and said:

'Welcome! Welcome! Happy New Year! And welcome to a new year at the Bangkok International Academy...'

'It's not my New Year yet, it's not the Chinese New Year until next month. It's not the Thai New Year until April. It's not Marwa's or Yoshiko's either,' thought Hu. She stopped listening.

She looked at the teachers sitting behind Mr Grisman on the stage. Mr Stanyer, her English teacher, was yawning. He was very sun-tanned. Mr Riding, the school counsellor, looked like a sleeping animal, until his eyes suddenly opened and slowly stared around the hall. Mrs Patel, the music teacher, was looking very pleased with life. She was wearing a lovely new sari, her traditional Indian dress. Where was Dr Nyondo, the head of Upper School?

There was a new woman. She was tall and about forty years old. She sat very straight. She had blond hair and a kind, intelligent face.

'... And as Dr Nyondo has left us to take up the position of principal of a high school in Australia, it is my pleasure...' Mr Grisman looked round at the woman who stood up. '... My great pleasure to introduce Mrs Verity Truman as the new head of Upper School.'

'That's my mother!' said John.

'Shhh!' said Marwa. 'Mustn't talk!'

But they did, as quietly as they could. Hu and John made friends while his mother made a short speech.

John was from Chicago, Illinois. He had one sister, Mary, who was in the fifth year. His father was a lawyer with a multinational company. John's father was now working in the Bangkok headquarters of his company, and working very long hours.

'My father's like that!' said Hu. 'I don't see much of him. I go to bed before he comes home in the evening. We don't have much time to talk even in the mornings.'

'What does he do?' asked John.

Hu told him that her father worked as an engineer for a Chinese oil company, managing the company's Bangkok office and projects in Eastern Thailand. And that her mother looked after small children at a kindergarten in the mornings and sometimes did baby-sitting at night. She told him that she had a pet cat called Lao Mao and that she liked music... and all kinds of things.

Mr Grisman was still talking. He invited Mrs Patel to talk to the school about the new school show. It was a musical called 'The Wizard of Oz'. Mrs Patel was going to hold auditions on Friday after school.

'What does "auditions" mean?' whispered Hu to John.

'You have to try out acting and singing in front of the people organising the show. If you're good, they give you a part. Do you sing, Hu?' asked John.

Hu was excited. 'I love singing. I can act too. I...'

'Shhh!' said Marwa. Mrs Patel looked angrily at Hu and John. Hu's face went red with embarrassment.

The first day passed happily and quickly. Hu was happy to be back among her friends and studying again after the holidays.

As Hu went into her last class, a Thai language class, her Thai teacher, Khun Naraporn, handed her a note. It was from Mr Stanyer, her English teacher. It read:

Please see me after class today. I want to discuss your English results with you.

D. S.

Marwa watched her read the note.

'Are you OK?' Marwa asked.

Hu passed her the note.

'Miss Hu! Please pay attention! Today we are going to study the traditions of the Thai New Year,' said Khun Naraporn.

'Oh dear!' thought Hu. She was very worried. She was sure the note was bad news. What was Mr Stanyer going to say? She tried to concentrate on her Thai lesson.

CHAPTER THREE

Sharing troubles

'But, Mr Stanyer? Forty-six per cent?'

'It's not good, Hu. It's not good.' Mr Stanyer was shaking his head.

'But, really, I...' Hu was close to tears.

'Listen!' said Mr Stanyer, leaning forward across the desk. His big red face was close to Hu's. He picked up Hu's writing test. 'Here's your work!'

He threw it across the desk at Hu. Hu thought this was very rude. As she collected the papers together, she knew her feelings would show in her face. She had worked hard on the essay and now it was covered in red ink.

'OK, Hu,' said Mr Stanyer. He smiled. Hu didn't like his smile. He tried to laugh and leant back in his chair and put his hands on his baldhead. The classroom was air- conditioned, almost too cool, but there were dark marks under his arms. 'You're a good kid, a bright kid. Your father wants you to be a doctor, right?'

'Yes, but...' Hu said.

'Yes, but!' Mr Stanyer moved forward suddenly hitting his hands on the desk between them.

'YES BUT!' he repeated in a loud voice to scare her. Then he remembered to smile. 'But your results have got to improve. It's only six weeks until the exams for the IB, the International Baccalaureate programme. Forty-six per cent is a fail. You can't be a doctor unless you get the IB.'

He could see Hu was going to cry. He pushed his chair back and stood up. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. He tried a new voice, a voice like a child asking their mother for a sweet.

'Hu, we can work on this. Together.' Mr Stanyer walked round the desk and slowly sat down in the chair next to Hu. He smelled of sweat. He put his arm on the back of Hu's chair. Hu sat as far forward as she could and looked at the desk. She was trying not to cry, trying not to smell Mr Stanyer's fat smell.

'It's a question of work. You're intelligent.' Hu looked at the desk. 'You work hard, Chinese people work hard,' said Mr Stanyer, laughing. 'Maybe I can help you, Hu?'

Hu tried to look at him. He was smiling his biggest, his most sugary smile.

'You need some extra lessons. Private lessons. One-to-one. After class. We can work on this exam preparation together.'

'You would give me lessons?' asked Hu. Mr Stanyer stood up and walked back to his own seat opposite her.

'Sure. Well, not exactly give you lessons. I mean, you'd have to pay.'

'I don't have any money, Mr Stanyer. How can I pay?' asked Hu.

'Hey! Your father's an oil engineer. You should talk to him!'

'But I can't tell...' Hu started to say, but she stopped. Now she stood up. She was very angry. She looked down at Mr Stanyer.

'I shall have to discuss this with my father.' She walked to the door without looking back.

'Sure!' Mr Stanyer called after her. 'Talk to your father. But Hu, those results have got to improve!'

Hu didn't start crying until she was outside the classroom.

There is a small wooden house in a banyan tree in the south corner of the school playing field, near the klong. The klong smell is very bad there, but after school it is a place you can sit alone.

Hu climbed in and threw herself into a broken car seat. She put her head in her hands and cried. She couldn't go home like this.

Her father wanted her to be a doctor. And now she was getting bad results. Hu's shoulders shook as she cried.

But she still didn't understand. All her other results were good or very good. In music and in drama she was, her teachers said, a 'star'. She dried her eyes.

Hu looked up. A face appeared in the entrance to the tree house.

'Can I come in?' said the face. It was her new friend, John Truman. As he said this, another face appeared. It was a small blond girl.

'This is my sister, Mary,' John said.

'Hi!' said Mary as the two pulled themselves into the tree house.

'This is Hu Jian Ming, Mary. And she doesn't look very happy,' John said.

'Hi Mary! Hi John!' Hu tried to look happy. 'What are you doing here?'

'Waiting for mother,' said Mary. 'She's at a teachers' meeting.'

'What's that?' asked John, pointing at Hu's hand.

Hu had not realised. Her English essay was now a small ball in her hand. She was so angry. She threw the essay to John.

John opened it out.

'That,' said Hu, 'is my English essay. My rubbish essay. My forty-six per cent essay. My failed essay. My...'. She stopped because she thought she was going to cry again.

John tried to read the essay.

'Hey, this is good,' said John. 'But Eve never seen so much red ink.'

John read from the essay: "'Wu Xi, My Home Town. The beautiful sailing boats, their red sails full, moved slowly over the mirror-like surface of the lakes.'

Wow! You can write! Is this where you live?'

'My father was working in Beijing before we came here. But I was born in Wu Xi. It is my home. My grandmother still lives there, and my mother's family. At our new year, we used to go there...'

"The friendly hills gather round the metal-smooth lakes as the skies turn pink," John read. 'This is good! When can I go there?'

'My teacher doesn't like it,' said Hu, sadly.

"Did..." I can't read his writing... "you copy this from a guide book?" Huh. I don't think this guy likes you, Hu.'

'I don't know. He's always looking at me in class.' Hu was confused.

John laughed and then looked serious.

'Forty-six per cent isn't very good. I hope this wasn't a test or something.'

John still had half a bottle of water he had bought at the Chinese shop opposite the school gates, and Hu had some of her morning snack left. The three of them had a little picnic. Hu made John and Mary promise not to tell anybody else, and then she explained her problems to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

To be a star

The noise in the school restaurant was very loud. Three hundred students were all shouting at once. Three hundred metal trays banged upon the tables, and all the metal forks and spoons and knives banged together at the same time.

'A normal day at the BIA,' shouted Hu as she sat down with Marwa, Yoshiko, Thomas and John.

'What's this?' shouted Thomas, pointing with his fork at a small pool of wet brown stuff.

'Food, Mr Kuhlauf, but not as we know it!' said John.

They all laughed except Marwa. She had her own food from home. Her mother had prepared a rice dish for her. It smelled delicious, and Marwa ate quickly and in silence.

'Are you going to the meeting after school?' asked Thomas. 'It's for the school show, "The Wizard of Oz".'

'Yes, I'm going,' said Hu.

'That awful Melanie Gibson wants to be the star,' said Thomas. 'You know her, she's got long red hair and she sings like a duck! Quack, quack!' he shouted.

'You are unkind, Thomas!' Hu said. 'It's true about her singing though.' She tried to look cross.

'And Sean Payne wants to be the Wizard,' Thomas continued.

'Sean Payne? The one who wasn't allowed to come to school for a while?' asked Yoshiko.

Sean Payne was always in trouble. Once he let out the air of the tyres on the principal's car. Mr Grisman sent him home and would not let him come back to the school for two weeks.

'That's him. The ugly one with hair like a brush. The one whose father runs a bar. He married one of his dancers, did you know?' said Thomas.

'Thomas Kuhlauf, you talk too much!' said Hu crossly. This time she was really angry. Thomas carried on talking about people who wanted to be in the school show. Hu decided not to listen any more.

John asked as quietly as he could. 'Did you talk to your father about extra English lessons?'

'I can't talk here. It's too noisy. Come to the library.'

Hu often went to the library at lunchtime and after school. It was cool. Hu loved to read, and the librarian, Miss Paula, helped her find new and interesting books.

John and Hu found a desk in a corner and talked quietly. Miss Paula let them talk, pretending not to notice. Hu was her favourite student. Hu read more than any other student in the school and often stayed after school to help her. Miss Paula was pleased to see Hu talking to such a good-looking boy. She noticed Hu was looking worried.

'No, I didn't talk to my father. I didn't see him last night or this morning. An important businessman is coming to Bangkok tonight, and my father must prepare for the visit. But...'

'Yes?' said John.

'But I don't want to talk to him about it. He worries too much. If he knows about my bad results, he'll be angry. He'll worry about it. And Mr Stanyer wants me to pay for the lessons. My father is not a rich man. I don't know what to do,' Hu explained.

'I've been thinking. Maybe I can help. You show me some more of your work and we can look at it together.'

'But John, that's too kind.'

'Not at all,' said John, smiling. 'Let's do a deal. I have to start Thai lessons, and you already speak Thai...'

'I'm not very good,' said Hu.

'Better than me!' said John. 'I'm a complete beginner. I have to wait after school with Mary until my mother has finished. We can study together in here some days.'

Hu thought for a moment. Most afternoons her mother was out doing small jobs to earn some extra money. Hu didn't like to return to the empty flat. And she needed help. John was very kind.

'OK, that's a good idea. Not today, though, there's the meeting about the show. And tomorrow Mr Stanyer wants me to have my first private lesson. But we can start next week.'

'That's agreed then,' said John. 'Oh, and give me your phone number. Then if I have a problem with my homework, I can ring and ask you for help. Or you can ring and ask me. Mine's 250 1972. What's yours?'

'255 1970,' replied Hu without thinking. She felt her face going red. 'But don't phone too late, my parents... I mean, I go to bed very early.'

Mrs Patel and John's mother, Mrs Truman, stood on the stage in the main hall with three other teachers.

'Sean? If you would be so good as to stop talking... ' Mrs Patel began.

'Hi!' shouted Sean, with a silly look on his face.

'For the new students, my name is Mrs Patel, and I am pleased to welcome you all. So many people want to join the show! If we cannot give you a singing part, there are many other jobs... Mrs Truman' - Mrs Patel gestured to Mrs Truman, who smiled - 'will explain that in a moment. My job is to be musical director. I will train you to sing and, I hope, to act the parts. Mrs Truman will be the producer. Mrs Truman will explain what she is going to be doing, and then I will tell you about how we will choose the actors.'

There were more than thirty students there. Thomas Kuhlauf was very excited, he couldn't keep still. Sean was already talking again. Melanie Gibson was brushing her beautiful red hair. She had changed out of her school uniform and was now wearing a pretty pink dress. 'Quack, quack,' thought Hu. Then she felt guilty.

Mrs Truman explained the job of the producer and all the jobs there were for people who were not singing and acting in the show. 'Making clothes, lighting, painting things, moving things, organising, publicity, tickets...' John knew he couldn't sing or act, but he loved painting and organising. He would, he decided, do one of these jobs.

Later they divided into groups. They had two exercises, one singing and one acting exercise.

Hu sat and read the song through. It was easy. She loved to sing. When she was not busy, Hu's mother would teach her to sing. Hu's mother had studied

opera before she married. When she was happy, Hu's mother would sing as she did the housework. That was not very often.

The singing went well. Hu sang simply while Mrs Patel played the piano. Some of the other students clapped their hands at the end. John and Thomas clapped hard. Hu was surprised when she saw Sean Payne clapping too, and smiling at her stupidly.

She was even more surprised when she had to act with Sean. Sean loved to make people laugh, and he didn't care if he looked stupid. Often he didn't know when to stop trying to make people laugh, but this time everything went well. He had learned his words and he didn't change anything. He made the other students laugh, and even Mrs Patel and Mrs Truman smiled. Hu felt wonderful. Maybe Sean Payne was not so stupid all the time.

'We think we can decide who will get the major parts straight away,' said Mrs Patel. 'So, I will read a list of people I want to stay behind at five o'clock. The rest of you can come back, please, next Thursday.'

Mrs Patel read out Hu's name. Hu was delighted. She was in the show! And so was Thomas, and Melanie Gibson and ('I don't believe it!' said Hu to John.), Sean Payne.

It was hard to wait to talk to Mrs Patel, Hu was so excited.

'You can have the part of Dorothy,' said Mrs Patel when it was Hu's turn.

'But? But, Dorothy's an American farm girl. I don't look right. I don't look like an American girl. I don't speak like an American. Melanie looks more like Dorothy... I...'

'Please, Hu!' said Mrs Patel, laughing. 'You sing beautifully. And American girls look just like you and me.'

Mrs Patel put her head back and laughed. 'I mean like me when I was your age. American girls are all different colours and shapes and sizes and... and you can sing and you can act.'

'My mother helped me learn to sing, she studied opera,' Hu said.

'That explains it. And you act very simply and very well. Melanie...' Mrs Patel paused. She was searching for words.

'Melanie sings like a duck,' thought Hu, but she didn't say anything.

'I think Melanie can be your understudy,' said Mrs Patel, at last.

'Understudy?' Hu didn't understand.

'Yes, someone who can take your place if you are ill. We call this person an "understudy". She will learn your part. If, for some reason, you cannot be in the show, she can be Dorothy.' Mrs Patel looked at Hu, waiting for her reply.

Hu felt unhappy. 'And if I am in the show? If I play Dorothy?'

'There are plenty of other parts for Melanie. Will you take the part?'

Hu waited a few minutes after her talk with Mrs Patel. She waited to know which part Thomas had got. Sean waited with her.

As Melanie left the main hall, she turned suddenly and looked Hu in the eyes. Melanie had clearly been crying. Her face was white with anger.

'You! Dorothy!' Melanie laughed. She laughed too loud. 'Hu Jian Ming, I know what you're doing! Just you wait! You'll see! I'll get you!' she was shouting, almost screaming. 'Cool!' said Sean, smiling stupidly.

