

# My Classmate Is A Bear

我的同學是一隻熊

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**Date:** 8/2021 **Right's contacts:** bft.children.comics@moc.gov.tw

232 pages | 14.8 x 21 cm **Volume:** 1 (plans for future sequels) **Rights sold:** Korean

**Awards:** 2022 The 15th Taipei International Book Exhibition Award, Children's and Young Adult Category,

First Prize

2021 The 81th Good Books Everyone Reads Award, Best Children's and Youth Book Award

2022 The 46th Golden Tripod Awards, Children's and Youth Books Category

2022 Ministry of Culture's 44th Selection of Books for Primary and Secondary School

**BFT2.0 Translator:** Michelle Kuo

*On a distant mountain, a school sits next to a forest where villagers have always lived in harmony with nature. But one day, a black bear appears at the classroom door and says, "I—want—to—go—to—school. Can—I?"*

Students in the rural village are startled at first, but soon they realize this black bear is gentle, curious, and eager to learn about the human world.

From that day on, the black bear joins the class, becoming a classmate and friend. He writes poems, paints pictures, and plays games in the forest. The children grow so fond of the bear that they decide to keep him a secret from the rest of the village. But will they succeed? What will happen if the villagers find out?

This award-winning and beautifully written book invites children to experience the beauty of Taiwan's mountains and forests while addressing important environmental issues. It awakens a timely and deep connection between humans and nature, telling a story of hope and coexistence.



## Writer **Yeou-yu Chang**

Yeou-yu Chang is a Taiwanese children's literature writer from Yuli Township, Hualien. Her works include *The Senior*, *Boring Egg Town*, *How Are You Today, Princess?*, *A Guo Cycling on Suhua Highway*, *Child of Saigon*, *My Dad the Hoodlum*, *Hey*, *The One in a Skirt*, *Goodbye! Olive Tree*, *Orchid Island*, *Flying Fish*, *Giants*, *Stories*, *I Heard the Moon Has a Study Room*, *Let's Paint a Magical Tree*, *The Little Chef Yuma series*, and the *Little Disciple Tu-Bao's Creative Lessons series*, including *Seven Ways to Eat Carrots*, *What Happens After Three Monsters?*, *Praise for the Sea*, and *Forest's Oddballs*.

Yeou-yu Chang has received numerous accolades. She won the 46th Golden Tripod Awards in the Children's and Youth Books Category, and First Prize at the 2022 Taipei International Book Exhibition Award in the Children's and Young Adult Category. Her works were selected for the 2021 Commonwealth Magazine Foundation SDGs Children's Sustainable Book List and recognized with the 2021 Good Books Everyone Reads Best Children's and Youth Book Award and received recognition in the Ministry of Culture's selection of books for primary and secondary school students.



## Illustrator **Chiang Meng-Yun**

Catfish is an illustrator who specializes in picture books and enjoys experimenting with various materials in her artwork. She is particularly fond of a cat's belly and a dog's nose, which often serve as inspiration in her work. Her art reflects her deep contemplation of the plight of animals, life's attitudes, and the meaning of existence. In addition to her picture books, Catfish occasionally holds solo and group exhibitions. She is dedicated to creating warm, powerful works that offer reflections on life. Her recent projects include the *Mission of Western Civilization at Possible Elementary School series*, graphic novels *Secret Bunny* and *Monster Mom*, and the picture books *What to Do Without a Rooster* and *Hitchhiking*.

# “In the Thick Fog, Four Bears Are Dancing”: A Word from the Author

By **Yeou-yu Chang**  
Translated by **Michelle Kuo**

Growing up in the mountains, I found that I got along better with plants than with people.

While many visit Taiwan's famous Alishan Forest for sightseeing, I like to say that I go to visit friends. The giant tree number “17” in Taiwan's Alishan Forests is one such friend. At 1,700 years old, this olive tree has witnessed more than most people ever will. In the mountainous area of Yuli, Hualien, where I am from, this ancient tree has been a friend and family member for about a hundred years. Quiet, generous, and always willing to listen, it shares the stories of a forest that lies between heaven and earth.

From a young age, I learned to be alone. Perhaps because I lived in the

mountains with neighbors scattered far apart, I would climb trees, pick flowers, and read beneath trees. As I grew older and moved to the city, I sought solace in escaping to the mountains whenever I could, wanting to see the trees, the mountains, the mist, and the wildflowers. A walk through the mountains always managed to calm my restless heart.

Once, while walking the ancient cypress trail in Taiping Mountain, I reached a lookout, expecting a beautiful view. Instead, a mischievous mist enveloped the area, spreading its arms and saying, “You can't see anything.” Through the thick fog, I glimpsed four bears dancing in the mist. The misty mountains and forests seemed like a fairyland; the world within the fog

felt like a fairy tale.

Perhaps the story began there, or maybe it started when I visited a school to give a lecture. The teacher guided me through the hallways, and as I glanced into each classroom, I noticed how focused every student was. “Every day, the kids are in the same classroom, with the same classmates, and the same teachers,” I thought. “It must be so boring!” Just then, as we passed the third-grade classroom,

*“Every day, the kids are in the same classroom, with the same classmates, and the same teachers. It must be so boring!” I thought. Just then, as we passed the third-grade classroom, I saw a strong, tall Formosan black bear sitting in the last row. I stared in amazement.*

I saw a strong, tall Formosan black bear sitting in the last row. It had a giant desk, an oversized chair, and a large pencil. I stared in amazement. “Oh my gosh, a bear is in class!” The bear turned to look at me, its huge head showing a surprised expression: “Wow, that person can see me!” Then, the bear and I exchanged smiles.

Writers often write about what they see. Since others can’t see it, they put it in

words so everyone else can.

When I decided to write *My Classmate is a Bear*, a particular bear began to occupy my consciousness. Whether I was walking, traveling, or reading, he was always with me. When I saw a beautiful beech tree, he’d whisper in my ear, “Hey, this could go into Chapter Four.” That’s how I work: I take the characters from my stories on walks, train rides, and coffee outings, and we chat together. Gradually, the story unfolds.

After finishing this story, I feel immense gratitude. I’m grateful for writing, which allows my reclusive self to experience a vast sky, a rich forest, and endless fields. I’m also thankful for this bear, who has made the long writing journey less lonely.

And why did I set the story in the third

grade? Because bears like third grade.

*This essay from the preface has been condensed for the purposes of this booklet.*

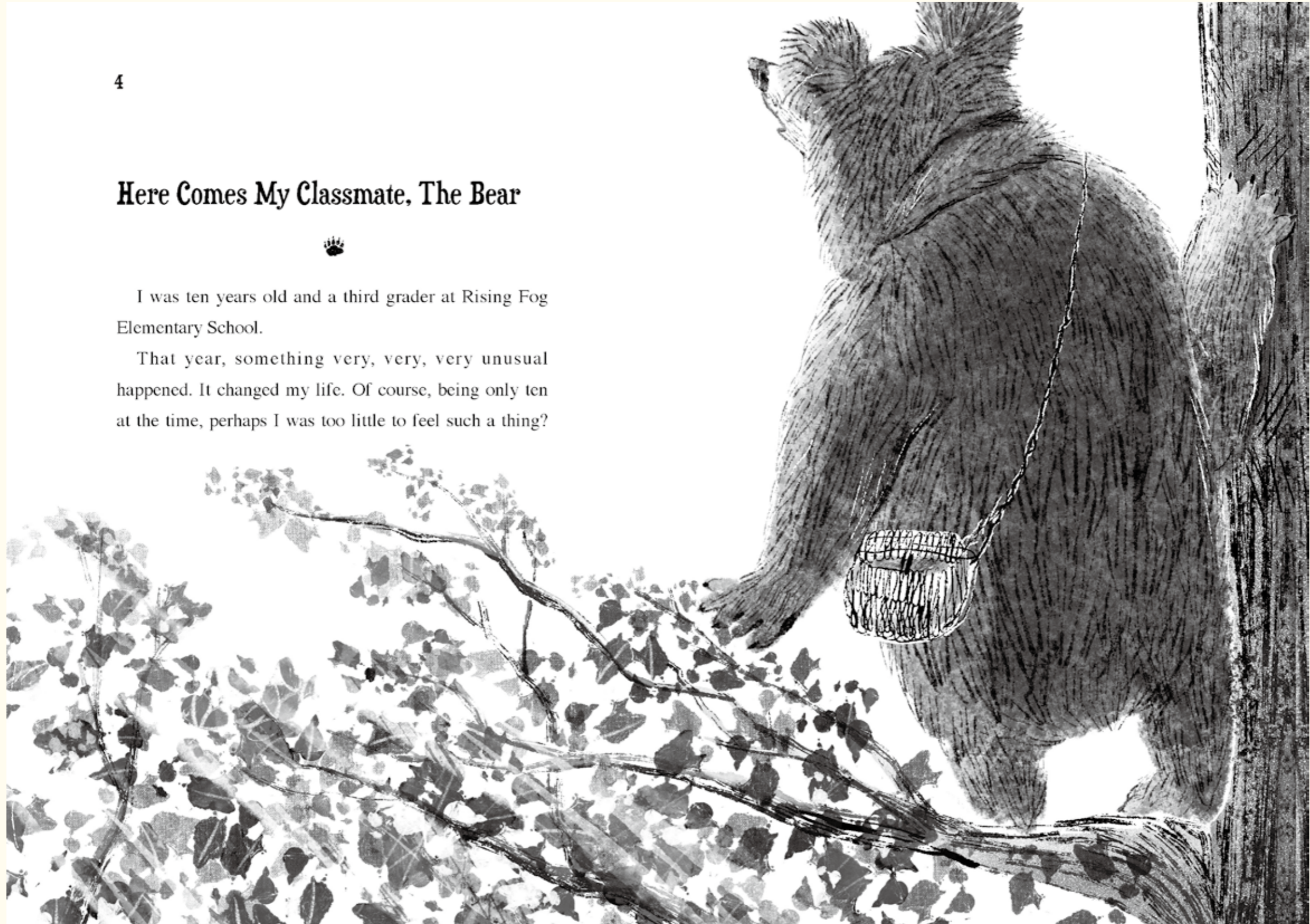


## Here Comes My Classmate, The Bear



I was ten years old and a third grader at Rising Fog Elementary School.

That year, something very, very, very unusual happened. It changed my life. Of course, being only ten at the time, perhaps I was too little to feel such a thing?





How could I have known what life and a lifetime really meant? Still, I might not have known it *then*, but I'm sure *now*, at age 14, that what happened has determined both my present and my future.

Before I tell you about that very unusual event, I must first tell you about my village. It's called Rising Fog and sits at an altitude of 1,000 meters above sea level. To get here, you have to drive forty minutes from a small town at the foot of a mountain. At the end of that road is a gigantic, century-old camphor tree, whose broad canopy is free and wild, like an enormous broccoli growing however it pleases. Only typhoons can stop it, but our village chief and neighborhood helpers do sometimes climb and prune the tree, just so that its branches won't fall and hurt someone. On days when the sun is unrelenting, standing under the tree is incredibly refreshing. Over thirty villagers can gather there, enjoying

its shade, which should give you an idea of how large the tree is! Anyway, behind the camphor tree, several small paths lead to the homes of those who live in Rising Fog.

At its peak, the village had more than ninety households. Now, there are only twenty left; soon, there will be fewer than ten. After graduating from elementary school, the children must go down the mountain to attend middle school. And the elderly, no longer able to make a living from farming, must go down and rely on their children. If I wanted, I could live down there with my parents, who run a motorcycle shop. But compared to bustling streets, I prefer a forest filled with the lively sounds of insects.

At school, my classmates include Chen Xiaoguo, whose parents sell vegetables at a market; that kind of work starts early and ends late, so they have no choice but to leave her on the mountain. Xi Song's mother

passed away, and his father drives a large truck all over Taiwan. He lives with his grandparents and on holidays goes down to visit his other grandma. Lin Yuquan's parents are divorced, but fortunately his grandparents love him dearly. Yu Sufei had no choice but to stay on the mountain because her grandparents are her only support.

Don't think for a second that just because our families have some difficulties, we feel forced to stay on the mountain. We're lucky to go to school here. Rising Fog Elementary is unique. Our art classes take place in a dense forest, and we learn to recognize different types of flowers, grasses, and trees. We know which leaves turn red for winter. We know that when the sky changes color, rain will fall. We know many things about the forest that you don't know.

Our school, as I've mentioned, is Rising Fog Elementary. Across from it is a grassy field and the main

road. When you enter the village, the first building you see is our school. It's to the left of the old camphor tree.

Our name, "Rising Fog," says a lot about us. Fog loves to visit—and it visits often. When it arrives, school and village disappear, and you enter a world utterly of your own. Sometimes, during the daily flag raising, the fog comes and envelops us all. Nobody can see each other. We can only hear the band playing and must picture the flag climbing the pole. Many schools have abandoned this ritual, but we've preserved it.

We enjoy the fog. It makes us happy, and we play tricks when it comes. For instance, if you're the flag-raiser, you can hoist the flag quickly, not at all in time with the music; you listen as the anthem plays and giggle until it ends. The fog has even come during our sports day—everyone thought they'd won first place.

You could say that the fog is like a naughty child who