



Elementary School in the Mountain

山間小學

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After a heated fight with his parents, a boy named Lijia runs away from home and stumbles upon a mysterious bus that takes him to a small school deep in the mountains.

At the mountain school, the teachers and students welcome Lijia, though he's still upset from his argument. But things feel odd to him. What are those strange shadows? And why does seeing them make his feelings fade, one by one?

Blending suspense and mystery, this young adult novel explores the struggles children face, from academic pressure to family conflicts and interpersonal relationships. It offers readers a way to confront and understand their negative emotions, reflect on past mistakes, and find the strength to move forward with courage and confidence.



Xinyu

Xinyu, a native of Taoyuan, enjoys rainy nights, the scent of rain, and the freshness of mornings after the rain. Passionate about reading and creating various types of stories, Hsin-Chih Weng hopes to turn many dreams and wishes into words.

Confronting Your Negative Emotions: A Profound Coming-of-Age Story for Young Adult Readers

By Lee Ming-Tzu

“Please, talk to my son Jun. He’ll listen to you. Whatever I say, he just talks back. I don’t know what else to do. I’m really just trying to do what’s best for him. You wouldn’t believe how well-behaved he was in elementary school. Also, please don’t tell him I called you, or he’ll be upset.”

Throughout my over twenty-year career as a high school teacher, I’ve received countless similar calls from parents. The concerns are often the same: poor grades, challenges related to school admissions, worries that their children’s friends are “bad influences,” excessive video game playing, and smoking.

Adolescents strive for peer acceptance and independence. They crave knowledge outside of academics and seek freedom from parental control to develop their

own identity. Under such intense pressure, they are more prone to anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and emotional instability.

Elementary School in the Mountain begins in a typical working-class family, with twelve-year-old Hu Lijia as the protagonist. After being unfairly blamed by his parents over a small misunderstanding, he runs away from home in anger. In his rage, Lijia boards a bus and, upon reaching the last stop, finds himself at a remote mountain school with only four students. Strangely, the teacher informs him that his parents have already transferred him to this school. Worse still, there’s no phone, no internet, and the bus only comes once a week.

Forced to wait for the next bus, Lijia has no choice but to stay at the school, integrating into this mixed-age class and

learning to get along with the teacher and other students. Throughout this experience, he gradually learns how to think independently, discuss problems with others, and help those around him. In time, former adversaries even become friends.

During this week of learning and waiting, Lijia and his classmate Yu Rui discover that the appearance of glowing light spheres is connected to the disappearance of their emotions. As they investigate, they realize that this mountain school exists at the boundary between the world of the living and the dead. When they lose all of their emotions, they can leave this world.

Elementary School in the Mountain explores the idea of negative emotions in a tangible, inspired way. Lijia’s anger, triggered by his classmate’s constant teasing, materializes as a red light sphere. Later, the teacher explains to Lijia: “The light spheres represent emotions. They are the embodiment of emotions. They can be anyone. They are shadows, born from the heart and

extinguished by the heart.”

In the story’s conclusion, much like the narrative in You Ming Lu’s classic medievalist fable *Records of the Hidden and Visible Realms*, we discover that a week in the mountains equates to just a single day in the real world. Will Lijia be able to return home as he hopes? Though brief, the ending gracefully weaves together the story’s surprises and twists.

The story poses a profound question: “If a person loses all their negative emotions, does that make them perfect?”

This poignant book is worth reading, as it unfolds like a play about a young person’s journey of self-discovery. It encourages you to confront your own negative emotions, picturing them as light spheres that illuminate your life.

The story poses a profound question: “If a person loses all their negative emotions, does that make them perfect?” This poignant book is worth reading, as it unfolds like a play about a young person’s journey of self-discovery and encourages you to confront your own negative emotions.

Li Ming-Tzu is a professor at Fo Guang University and has long been dedicated to children’s literature research, creation, and promotion.

This excerpt from the book’s afterword has been condensed for this booklet.



Prologue

Crash!

A white plate shattered into pieces on the floor.

“Why don’t you ever listen to what I say?” my mother yelled.

Tears welling in my eyes, I looked down at the floor.

“It was an accident,” I said.

My father, who’d heard the commotion, rushed in.

“What’s going on?” he asked .

“I told him to stay away from the stove, but he smashed the plate on the floor,” said my mother.

My father glared at me. “Your mom told you to stay away from the stove. Why are you upset? How can you throw a tantrum like this!”

I had only wanted to help by passing her the plate. But she’d bumped into me and knocked it out of my hand.

“I wasn’t—”

“Don’t talk back to me!”

My father slapped me hard across my face; it stung and burned.

How could they do this to me, I thought. Why don’t they ever listen? *Forget it, I give up—I’m done. I don’t want to stay in this house anymore!*

I left the house and ran through the streets alone.

The sun blazed and I could barely open my eyes. The tears on my face must have glittered under the sun. I wiped my tears before anyone could see them, but a few people still secretly looked at me.

I hated crying in public, but I wanted to leave that depressing house forever.

Wandering with no place to go, I noticed a green bus stop near the convenience store.

That’s weird, I thought. Has there always been a bus stop there?

I boarded the bus without even asking where it was headed. I just wanted it to take me far, far away.

I walked all the way to the back of the bus, took a window seat, and fastened my seat belt. Before long, I fell asleep...





New School

“Final stop, elementary school!”

The bus driver’s voice startled me. I got off the bus, groggy and half-asleep. The pure, fresh air caught me off-guard. Birds and insects chirped with glee.

By the time I’d awakened, the bus was gone. I found myself in the middle of a forest, surrounded by towering trees, walking along a dirt path. There were no buildings and not a person in sight.

I couldn’t help but ask myself: how did I end up here?

Noticing a bus stop sign covered in moss, I brushed it off. It revealed a schedule, but the print had faded. I tried to figure out when the next bus would arrive. It read: Eight o’clock every Monday morning.

Every Monday?! The bus only came once a week!

Today was Monday, which meant I had to wait seven days before I could leave this place.

How would I survive in the wild for a week?

Right—the bus driver said something about an elementary school. Was there a school around here? I

should be able to get some help!

I continued along the dirt path and kept going. In the dense forest, I saw a building that resembled a school. The area near the gate was empty. A stone wall to one side had three words embossed in gold: Forest Elementary School. Listening closely, I heard kids playing inside. Relieved, I walked toward the sounds of the children.

The building was dilapidated. Its paint peeled; its walls were cracked. On its left side lay a playground with slide shaped like an elephant and some wavy bars. Two boys, who looked around my age, played on the slide.

I wanted to ask them where we were. What city was this? What county? But I was too embarrassed to ask, so I stood in the shade and merely looked on.

Spotting me, one of the boys walked my way. “Who are you? What are you doing in our school?” he yelled.

Slightly freckled, he had bushy curly hair that suggested a mean temper.

“Say something,” he said. “Can’t you talk?” The aggressive way he spoke reminded me of headstrong classmates who got together to beat up whomever they





wanted to pick on.

I never got along with people like this. Stammering, I forced myself to speak. “I—I got on the wrong bus and ended up here. I saw there was a school and thought I could get some help.”

He frowned and stared at me. “Wrong bus? You look like you’re our age. You’re old enough—how did you get on the wrong bus?”

I just got on it, I thought. What else could I have done? Deep down, I was screaming. But I couldn’t utter a word.

The other boy cut in and said, “Let me bring you to our teacher. He should know what to do.” He wore a light blue hat and smiled at me warmly.

“Hung, why are you helping him? He got on the wrong bus and needs help, but he ignores people. What’s that about?” The boy with curly hair scowled further and continued to stare at me.

Ding, ding, ding! The school bell rang. Everyone hurried inside the school building. I had nothing to do but follow them.

When I reached the door, I saw that their classroom was very small, only a few paces wide. The white walls, much like the exterior, had turned yellow and were peeling away. At the back of the room, a board displayed a few student drawings. The old blackboard was covered in chalk stains that seemed impossible to erase.

Unlike the classroom, the wooden desks and chairs looked brand-new and even had the aroma of fresh paint.

There were five sets of desks and chairs, the most that could fit into the classroom.

Two of the seats were occupied; the other three were not. The boys took those two seats, and I wondered who would occupy the last one.

I asked the boy with curly hair, “What class is this? What year?”

He looked confused and said, “What class? There is only one class and everybody sits in the same classroom. You’re super weird.” He took a seat and left me standing by the door, flustered.

