

GUARDIAN OF THE EVERLASTING STONE

長生石的守護者

* Over 15,000 copies sold within a year

* Top selling children's author with over 12 weeks on the Eslite
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An ocean-loving girl finds a piece of shimmering jade calling to her while she's diving. After she carries it home, a sheep spirit comes out and warns that an evil warlock from ancient times is returning as part of his quest for immense power.

Hsi-yang loves to go diving with her brother. One day, she's accidentally pulled adrift by the current and sees a stone shimmering in the ocean. She can't help but bring it home. When she gets back to shore, she discovers that it's a piece of jade in the shape of a sheep. Suddenly, it glimmers then a sheep spirit appears and tells her the story of an evil warlock called Wukuei who lived over three thousand years ago. The spirit warns her that a devilish power is going to bring Wukuei back, and it's up to them to stop him.

With the help of a golden owl and a dragon, Hsi-yang uncovers the magical power hidden in ancient artifacts. But she needs more than just courage and wisdom to save the world from Wukuei's clutches. When her deceased mother appears, Hsi-yang is forced to confront her own regrets, otherwise Wukuei will take advantage of her and secure the immense power he has always craved.

Combining fantasy with real historical artifacts, Chen Yu-Ju tells a story of adventure, friendship, and family bonds. A page-turning bestseller which has sold over 15,000 copies in Taiwan, *Guardian of the Everlasting Stone* is the best fiction for children to get interested in the ancient world of the artifacts and discover the joy of reading.



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Chen Yu-Ju 陳郁如

Born in an artistic family, Chen Yu-Ju studied arts in the US and started writing children's books at the age of 40. Her first book *Cultivation* was an instant hit on publication and made her the most popular children's fantasy writer in Taiwan. Often described as the "Taiwanese JK Rowling", Chen Yu-Ju uses elements of East Asian culture as a gateway to her fantasy worlds. She now lives in Los Angeles.

GUARDIAN OF THE EVERLASTING STONE

By Chen Yu-Ju

Translated by Helen Wang

Part 1 — Sheep with Special Powers

1: Hsi-yang

Hsi-yang glanced at the dive pressure gauge. Everything was going to plan. Hsi-hai was leading the way. He looked back at his little sister, the two of them hand-signaled okay, and continued swimming. Hsi-yang kicked her flippers up and down, took long slow breaths, and followed her brother at a steady pace, enjoying the coral reef and the tropical fish as she swam.

Hsi-yang was fifteen now, and had been diving for a year. Hsi-hai was three years older than her, and had more diving experience. Three years earlier their mother had died, and Dad had moved to this small town by the sea to open a diving shop, and be a diving instructor. He had taught them both to dive, and now they both had their licenses. Hsi-yang loved this new activity: she loved going out in the sea, she loved the sea creatures. She loved slipping into the embrace of the sea, surrounded by sunshine, and she loved exploring the dark, mysterious ocean in the quiet of night.

Hsi-hai swam past a jutting-out reef, and turned right towards a canyon-like formation. Just as Hsi-yang was about to turn, she felt something catch her foot. She looked down and saw a large plastic bag wrapped around her flipper.

Hsi-yang pulled a face. She hated seeing rubbish in the sea, and it was horrible to have it catch on her! She stopped, reached back to remove the plastic bag, scrunched it up, and put it in the pocket of her BCD (Buoyancy Control Device). By the time she looked up again, there was a gap between her and her brother. As she started to hurry after him, a strong current from the right pushed her sideways, further away from Hsi-hai.

Sea currents are unpredictable, but Hsi-yang had some experience of them, and wasn't afraid. The current swept her some distance, but she managed to hook her fingers round a rocky outcrop and steady herself. The next time she looked up, she saw that her brother's attention was focused inside the rock-cave. He was peering in deeper with the light of his torch. He hadn't noticed she'd fallen behind.

Hsi-yang knew the current was too strong for her to swim over to him, and that he was too preoccupied to check on her. She cursed him under her breath a few times, knowing that she had to think of a way of catching his attention.

She held on to the reef with one hand, and pulled out her pocket-knife with the other. She couldn't shout to him underwater, but the sound of the knife hitting the metal air canister would be louder in the water. The jutting-out part of the reef wasn't strong enough to take the force of the current and her hand, and it broke, catching her off-guard and thrusting her forward on the current.

After a while the current slowed, and she was able to stabilize. She added some air to the BCD, got a better buoyancy, and was able to slow her breathing. She looked around for her brother and realized that she had dropped the pocket knife at some point.

When you lose something at sea, that's it, you can't go back for it. She felt sorry about losing the knife: it was Hsi-hai's and he would be cross. But he should have been looking out for her!

They had dived together many times, and had been separated before, so Hsi-yang wasn't worried. They knew to spend no longer than a minute looking for each other, but to rise to the surface and rejoin above water. Hsi-yang looked around for a minute, in case the current had swept him this way as well.

The reef was higher here, and seemed to block the strong current and slow it down. As she swam past a few rocks, something caught her eye. She glanced at the pressure gauge. She had time to check it out. If it was rubbish, she remove it and take it with her.

She swam over and found that something small and shiny was caught in the reef. She pulled out a hard, knobby thing and tried to work out what it was. It felt like stone, but was scored on the top, and glowed with a pale white pearly light. She thought it was interesting and slipped it into her BCD pocket.

Hsi-yang couldn't see her brother, so decided to rise to the surface. She made a three-minute safety stop five meters below the surface. She knew that the deeper you dive, the greater the pressure, and more nitrogen gets into your bloodstream. The purpose of the three-minute stop at five meters was to expel that nitrogen, to make it safe to return to the surface. When Hsi-yang surfaced her BCD was full of air.

"Hsi-yang! Where were you?" her brother asked impatiently.

Hsi-yang spat out the mouthpiece and couldn't help shouting, "Oh, I got caught in the undercurrent, only you were too busy to notice."

"You had my knife, didn't you? You could have clanged it on the canister to call me!" Hsi-hai grumbled as he swam over.

"I didn't have time." It was strange how he shifted the blame on to her.

Hsi-hai glanced at her. "Where is my knife?"

"Er...it got swept away...." Hsi-yang said quietly.

"What! That was my favorite knife!" Hsi-hai's sea-soaked face was already a bit distorted, and when he frowned, it looked even worse. Luckily, no one ever said she looked like him.

"Hey! I'm your sister. My life's more important than a knife, isn't it?" Hsi-yang shot back.

“You look fine to me. You don’t look as though your life was in danger. Anyway, let’s head back to shore.” Hsi-hai said impatiently.

Hsi-yang and her brother weren’t particularly close, or particularly distant. They argued and squabbled like siblings do, then went out to sea together, ate together, and watched TV together. But she didn’t like her brother’s attitude. It wasn’t a nice experience being separated from her diving buddy, and not following the plan could be dangerous. Hsi-hai was her big brother and was supposed to look after her. He was out of order arguing with her over a knife.

Back on shore, Hsi-hai didn’t say anything, and Hsi-yang couldn’t be bothered to think about him any more. They walked back to Dad’s shop with their heavy gear on their backs. Then they offloaded it and put everything back in its place, rinsed what needed to be rinsed, and soaked what needed to be soaked. Hsi-yang took everything out of her BCD pocket, and threw the scrunched up plastic bag that had caught on her leg into the bin. She held the creamy white stone in her hand, but couldn’t think what it was doing in her pocket. It took her a while to remember that it was the shiny thing that caught her attention. As she held it in her hand now, it looked like an ordinary stone, and didn’t glow at all. Had she been seeing things? Had the sea bent the light? It was just a stone. She was a bit disappointed, but she put the stone in her bag to take home.

She slung her bag on her back and walked home. It was only half a block from the diving shop. Dad had bought an old three-story house in town at the same time as he bought the diving shop by the sea. The main street was two blocks away, their school five blocks. Everywhere was within walking distance, which made life simple and convenient.

Hsi-yang didn’t see her brother and assumed he had gone to work. In any case, she didn’t want to think about him. She went up the two flights of stairs to her bedroom and lay down wearily on the bed. For some reason, she suddenly thought about the stone, got up, opened her bag, and held the stone in the palm of her hand.

It was about 10 cm long, 5 cm wide, and was mostly a translucent creamy white color, with a few pale yellow spots. She examined it carefully and discovered that the knobby stone actually was the shape of a sheep. It was sitting down with its head turned to the left, which gave it a calm, serene appearance. Hsi-yang had always liked sheep. She remembered arguing with her parents when she was little that she didn’t want to be born in the year of the rooster, she wanted to be a sheep. They’d shaken their heads and smiled. But they had always bought her a soft-toy sheep for her birthday. Lots of little girls like dolls, but Hsi-yang liked sheep.

Hsi-yang held the stone sheep in her hand, and took an instant liking to it. It had an old, rustic charm to it. As she played with it and turned it over in her hands, she discovered traces of damage to its right hind leg.

She ran her fingers over the damaged part and felt a sudden pang in her heart. She felt sorry for the sheep, and couldn’t stop thinking about its injured leg. At the same time, she was surprised to feel so upset about a stone.

Just then, the cold stone suddenly became warm – not a burning heat, but a gentle warmth. The creamy translucence started to change, becoming paler and paler as though it might disappear before her eyes.

Hsi-yang stared, wide-eyed, at the stone, and was even more surprised when the stone started to glow with the same soft pearly light that she had seen in the crack in the reef.

The circle of light started to move. It swayed gently, as though it might break away from the stone. Then it did break away, and hung above the stone before starting to rise.

It was incredible. Hsi-yang's eyes were almost popping out of her head, and her mouth was wide open. The floating light reminded her of the translucent little jellyfish in the sea.

She wanted to touch it. As she moved her finger towards the pearly circle of light, it began to change shape, as though an invisible hand was molding it into the shape of a sheep. She put her hand out to catch it on her palm.

She looked closely at the light-sheep. It was about the same size as the stone sheep, but was like a real sheep, with a pearly glowing fleece. It was so pretty! The sheep gazed at Hsi-yang with gentle eyes, its mouth slightly open, slightly moving.

It was speaking! Hsi-yang looked closer. She could see its mouth moving, and its face was lively and expressive. The light-sheep was talking to her, but she couldn't hear what it was saying.

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Hsi-yang asked, "I know you are talking, but I can't hear you."

The sheep seemed to understand. It stopped talking and nodded at Hsi-yang.

"Can you hear me?" Hsi-yang asked. She was excited to be having a conversation with a light-sheep that had come out of a stone!

The sheep nodded again.

"What do you want to tell me?" Hsi-yang asked, immediately realizing that it was useless question as the sheep could only answer with a yes or a no.

The sheep tilted its head, as though thinking, then looked directly at Hsi-yang. She felt awkward, and was just trying to think of a yes / no question to ask the sheep, when she caught a glimpse of something in the sheep's soft gaze.

It's not quite right to say she saw it, because she didn't see it with her eyes, but in her mind, as if she was dreaming. Even so, it was crystal clear.

2: Long Ago in the Shang dynasty

Long ago in the Shang dynasty, a seven- or eight-year-old girl was walking with an old woman on a dark mountain road. They were both frightened.

"I can't walk any more, Huir. Run back to the village and ask Father to come and help." Huir's mother was out of breath, and could barely put one foot in front of the other.

"I'm not going to leave you. I'll help you. We're nearly there!" Huir said anxiously as she took her mother's arm. But they managed only a couple of steps before Huir's mother collapsed at the side of the road.

"Hurry back to the village!" Huir's mother urged.

"No, Mother, please get up!"

As Huir tried to pull her mother up, they heard a wolf's howl. They had wanted to get home before the wolves could attack, but now that Huir's mother had fallen, they were circling boldly. Three pairs of dusky yellow eyes were on the road behind them, on the approach, preparing to attack.

All of a sudden, something white flashed in front of Huir and her mother.

"That's Big White, isn't it?" Mother whispered. The family's big and completely white ewe was walking towards them.

"Big White, what are you doing here? Go home." Huir tried to push the big white sheep back, but it ignored her, and walked past them towards the wolves.

"Big White, come back! They'll eat you!" Huir shouted.

But Big White was determined and with its eyes gleaming, ran straight towards the wolves, bleating loudly. Strangely, the wolves started to whimper and whine, as if they were frightened, and as it approached, they stepped back. Then they turned around and ran away.

Huir and her mother were stunned. Big White bleated a few times to make sure the wolves had gone, and came back to Huir and her mother. Big White stood close to Huir's mother, and gradually the warmth from the sheep's body revived Huir's mother. She stood up, and with Huir's support and Big White to protect them, the three of them walked home slowly and safely.

Then the scene changed: Hsi-yang no longer saw a little girl, but a teenager, about fifteen or sixteen, on a farm with six sheep. Hsi-yang somehow knew that they were Big White's offspring, and that Big White had died soon after they were born. And that those sheep were very dear to Huir.

Hsi-yang saw six identical sheep whose white fleeces had a faint glow with an almost pearly lustre. The sheep that had come from the stone was one of these six sheep.

Huir sat on the grass with the sheep. The sheep grazed peacefully but Huir looked worried. A few days earlier a group of people had come to the house. They were all guards of the Great Shang king. They had filled the rooms and asked her parents to prepare food and drink, but had given nothing in return and had turned their lives upside down. Earlier that day, they said they had been informed that Huir's family had six rare pearly sheep which had special powers, and that they had been ordered to take them back to Yindu, the Shang capital, where they would be sacrificed to the ancestors and dedicated to the gods and spirits. The guards said this would bring honor to the sheep and the family, that the family should thank the king for his kindness and that they would set out with the sheep on the road to Yindu in the morning.

As Huir watched the sun slip slowly into the mountains, and as twilight darkened around her, the thought of the six sheep being taken away was too much for her to bear, and she decided to set them free that night.

A bright moon shone over the earth that night. When the king's guards had eaten their fill and were fast asleep, Huir crept out of the house and opened the farm gate.

"Go now! Quickly! It's not safe for you here!" Hui quietly urged the sheep.

Usually when she opened the fence, the sheep ran out happily. But that night they refused to move. No matter how hard she tried, they would not go. Huir had to drag them out two at a

time. She led the first two out of the village, then went back for the next pair. But the first pair stubbornly followed her back. Huir sighed, then dragged them up the mountain, taking them far enough so they wouldn't follow her when she turned back. It took Huir a long time to do this, and when she finally hurried home she discovered she was too late.

All the animals in the pen were lying dead on the ground. There was no sign of the four sheep. With a huge sense of dread, and legs like jelly, Huir went towards the house.

Inside, by the light of the moon shining in through the window, she saw two people lying on the floor – her parents were covered in blood, and there was no sign of life.

It turned out that some of the king's guards had got up in the night. When they discovered that two of the sheep they were to take for the king had gone, and that the owner's daughter had gone too, they were so angry that they killed all the people and animals at the farm. Then, fearing they might bring disaster on themselves if they did not complete their mission, they took the other four sheep and left for Yindu that night.

With their special powers, the two sheep had sensed difficult times ahead for the family. They knew that Huir would be killed too, as soon as she got home, which was why they had refused to move. They wanted to wait until the killing at the house was over and the guards had left before letting Huir go back.

Huir was terribly upset. She knelt on the floor beside her parents. She couldn't bear to see the stab wounds and fetched a quilt to place over them. Quiet, sad, and helpless, she stayed with them in that dark room.

When she finally came out of her daze, she knew she had to bury her parents. She moved them carefully, and as she did so, she noticed some scratches on the floor by her mother. She looked at them closely and saw that her mother had used her last breath and her bloodied hand to write 巫比 (Wubi) on the floor beside her.

Huir remembered that her mother had talked about Wubi when she was little. Wubi was a wizard. He could drive away evil spirits and bring good luck. He had been the palace wizard, but had offended a prince and been banished to the south, where he'd wandered about and helped many people. Huir's mother wanted her daughter to go and find him.

Huir knew she was on her own now, and that she was not safe at the house. The king's guards needed those two sheep, and would come looking for her. If they couldn't find the two sheep, she would pay with her life. She needed to get out of there fast. Huir rubbed the tears from her eyes, buried her parents, and scrubbed out the writing on the floor. She decided to follow her mother's wish, and go to find Wubi. But before she did that, she had to go up the mountain and find the two sheep.

The two sheep seemed to know that Huir would return, and were grazing where she had left them. She was so happy to see them, but also felt sad for them as their siblings had been taken away. Huir hugged them and wept, and they snuggled up and whimpered. Huir didn't dare to stay long, and led the sheep away from the village, heading south in search of Wubi.

Everywhere she went, Huir enquired after Wubi, and every time she learned that he'd moved a little further south.