

# BOOKS FROM TAIWAN





## BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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# EDITOR'S PREFACE

Welcome to Taiwan; welcome to the wonderfully weird. If this issue of *Books from Taiwan* doesn't blow your mind, it will certainly bend it a little. The standout titles featured here showcase difference, subversion, and inventiveness on every level. Unconventional characters like the violent tomboy protagonist and her photophobic friend in *Awaiting the Moon*, the half-anonymous journalist in *Lightless*, and the pink-bicycle-riding Aqua Grannie of *A-Ga* generate enough energy to power a city block. *Tangut Inn* creates a narrative consciousness that moves through time in any direction it pleases, like a fish through water, and blends multiple literary styles and voices into one as it links its characters across millennia. *The Summer General Winter Came* features dead souls as the proactive saviors of the broken or lonely living, breaking a "fifth wall" of literary realism in a search to find language to describe trauma. Qiu Miaojin describes the forced subversion of queer youth in the 1980s, while Hsu Liang-Liang and her successful, urbane, yet anxious friends step forward to tell their own stories of rejection and independence in the story collection dubbed "the Taiwanese *Sex and the City*."

As I was attending the 2017 Taipei Rights Workshop only a few short weeks ago, a fellow international guest asked me about the differences between literature from Taiwan and from the rest of the Sinophone world. While I am certainly not qualified to make generalizations (is anyone?), I observed that the Taiwanese works which have passed under my eye so far have shown remarkable literary courage – that is, an explicit commitment to finding new voices, new styles, new ways of "disjoining sense into meaning," to quote T.S. Eliot. I do not know what pressures motivate their bravery – a critical love for the Chinese language, attention to disappearing ways of life in Taiwan, and a sharp awareness of world literature are certainly there – but I remain grateful for their ingenuity and willingness to keep becoming.



**Canaan Morse**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

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# MINISTRY OF CULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN) TRANSLATION GRANT PROGRAM

*Books from Taiwan* supports the translation of Taiwanese literature into foreign languages with the Translation Grant Program, administered by The Ministry of Culture of Taiwan. The grant is to encourage the publication of translations of Taiwan's literature, including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics, and help Taiwan's publishing industry to explore non-Chinese international markets.

- Applicant Eligibility: Foreign publishers (legal persons) legally registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respective countries, or foreign natural persons engaged in translation.
- Conditions:
  1. Works translated shall be original works (including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and comics) by Taiwanese writers (R.O.C. nationality) in traditional Chinese characters.
  2. Priority is given to works to be translated and published for the first time in a non-Chinese language market.
  3. Applicants are not limited to submitting only one project for funding in each application year; however, the same applicant can only receive funding for up to three projects in any given round of applications.
  4. Projects receiving funding shall have already obtained authorization for translation, and be published within two years starting from the year after application year (published before the end of October).
- Funding Items and Amount
  1. The subsidy includes a licensing fee for the rights holder of original work, a translation fee and a production fee.
  2. The maximum funding available for any given project is NT\$ 500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).
- Application Period: From September 1 to September 30 every year.
- Announcement of successful applications: December every year.
- Application Method: Please apply via the online application system ([http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant\\_en.php](http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant_en.php)) after reading through the Translation Grant Application Guidelines (available online).

For full details of the Translation Grant Program, please visit

[http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant\\_en.php](http://booksfromtaiwan.tw/grant_en.php)

Or contact: [books@moc.gov.tw](mailto:books@moc.gov.tw)

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# MINISTRY OF CULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

## THE PIVOT SOUTH TRANSLATION AND PUBLISHING PROGRAM

The Ministry of Culture has formulated these guidelines to encourage the publication of translations of Taiwan's literature, in the territories of South Asia, Southeast Asia and Australasia (hereinafter referred to as the Pivot South nations), as well as to fund exchange trips for publishers and the publication of original titles that deal with the cultures of Taiwan and the Pivot South nations, as well as the topic of cultural exchange between them.

South Asia, Southeast Asia and Australasia will be taken to mean: Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Australia and New Zealand.

The program is split into three different strands, which are:

1. Translation and Publication Grant Program
2. Publisher Exchange Program
3. Original Book Program

- Applicant Eligibility:

1. Citizens of the Republic of China (Taiwan) or civic organizations and legal persons registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic of China (Taiwan).
2. Citizens of the aforementioned Pivot South nations or civic organizations and legal persons registered in accordance with the laws and regulations of their respected country.

- Funding Items and Amount

1. Translation and Publishing Grant Program: The maximum funding available for any given project is NT\$ 500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).
2. Publisher Exchange Program: The maximum funding available for any given project is NT\$ 500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).
3. Original Book Program: The maximum funding available for any given work is NT\$ 500,000 (including income tax and remittance charges). For a series, the funding will be multiplied by the number of books in the series, but total funding will be limited to NT\$2,000,000 (including income tax and remittance charges).

- Application Period: From September 1 to September 30 every year.

- Application Method: Please apply via the online application system (<https://nspublication.moc.gov.tw/en/>) after reading through the Pivot South Translation and Publishing program application guidelines (available online).

- Announcement of successful applications: December every year.

For full details of the The Pivot South Translation and Publishing Program, please visit:

<https://nspublication.moc.gov.tw/en/>

Or contact [books@moc.gov.tw](mailto:books@moc.gov.tw).

# BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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# NOTES OF A CROCODILE

## 鱷魚手記

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### QIU MIAOJIN 邱妙津

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- Category: Literary Fiction
  - Publisher: Ink
  - Date: 10/2006 (first published in 1994)
  - Rights contact: [booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com](mailto:booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com)
  - Pages: 229
  - Length: 105,000 characters (approx. 70,000 words in English)
  - Rights sold: World English (NYBR), Simplified Chinese (Imaginist), French (Noir sur Blanc), Japanese (Sakuhinsha), Spanish (Gallo Nero)
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Qiu Miaojin was a landmark writer, as well as a literary pioneer for building positive queer identities in contemporary Taiwan. Born in 1969, she grew up in the later years of the White Terror, a time that greatly influenced her work. She began writing serious fiction in college, after which she moved to Paris to study psychology. Her literary creation never ceased, and she won several domestic prizes for both novels and novellas. Terms she coined, like “Lazi” and “crocodile,” were taken up by Taiwan’s queer community and made a part of that culture. Her longer works, such as *Last Words from Montmartre* and *Notes of a Crocodile*, have sold to the US., China, Japan, France, and Spain, and published in English as part of the New York Review of Books Classic Series.



The crocodile is a living iceberg: a great presence that hides nine-tenths of itself underwater, with only eyes and nose breaking the surface. To the young university student Lazi, she and those who feel as she does must live like crocodiles, as their sexuality forces them to present a face to the world that looks nothing like their entire selves.

Qiu Miaojin, author of *Last Words from Montmartre*, displays her mastery of the personal voice in another dark and highly complex story of love between women in an oppressive social context – the first years after the lifting of martial law in Taiwan. A series of eight diary entries tell the story of Lazi’s relationships with others looking to find themselves as she is, and particularly with Shui Ling, a senior classmate with whom she is in love.

This book, dubbed by some as Taiwan’s best novel about sexuality and queer identity tells the hidden stories of dreamers escaping an age of enforced homogeneity. It speaks of pain in the “I” that Qiu Miaojin crafts better than anyone else.

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# NOTES OF A CROCODILE

By Qiu Miaojin

Translated by Bonnie Huie

Excerpt courtesy of New York Review of Books

## 2

In the past I believed that every man had his own innate prototype of a woman, and that he would fall in love with the woman who most resembled his type. Although I'm a woman, I have a female prototype too.

My type would appear in hallucinations just as you were freezing to death atop an icy mountain, a legendary beauty from the furthest reaches of fantasy. For four years, that's what I believed. And I wasted all my college days – when I had the most courage and honesty I would ever have towards life – because of it.

I don't believe it anymore. It's like the impromptu sketch of a street artist, a little drawing taped to my wall. When I finally stopped believing in it and learned to leave it behind, I wound up selling a collection of priceless treasures for next to nothing. It was then that I realized I should leave behind some sort of record before my memories evaporated. I feared that otherwise it would be like waking from a dream, when the inventory of what had been bought and sold – and at what price – would be forever lost.

It's like a series of roadside warning signs. The one behind me says: DON'T BELIEVE THE FANTASY. The one ahead of me says: WIELD THE AX OF CRUELTY. One day it dawned on me as if I were writing my own name for the first time: Cruelty and mercy are one and the same. Existence in this world relegates good and evil to

the exact same status. Cruelty and evil are only natural, and together they are endowed with half the power and half the utility in this world. It seems I'm going to have to learn to be crueler if I'm to become the master of my own fate.

Wielding the ax of cruelty against life, against myself, against others. It's the rule of animal instinct, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics – and the axis of all four. And the comma that punctuated being twenty-two.

## 3

Shui Ling. Wenzhou Street. The white bench in front of the French bakery. The number 74 bus. We sit at the back of the bus. Shui Ling and I occupy opposite window seats, the aisle between us. The December fog is sealed off behind glass. Dusk starts to set in around six, enshrouding Taipei. The traffic is creeping along Heping East Road. At the outer edge of the Taipei Basin, where the sky meets the horizon, is the last visible wedge of a bright orange sun whose radiance floods through the windows and spills onto the vehicles behind us, like the blessing of some mysterious force.

Silent, exhausted passengers pack the aisle, heads hung, bodies propped against the seats, oblivious. Through a gap in the curtain of their winter coats, I catch Shui Ling's eye, trying to contain the enthusiasm in my voice.

"Did you look outside?" I ask, ingratiatingly. "Mmm," comes her barely audible reply.

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Then silence. For a still moment, Shui Ling and I are sitting together in the hermetically sealed bus. Out the windows, dim silhouettes of human figures wind through the streets. It's a magnificent night scene, gorgeous and restrained. The two of us are content. We look happy. But underneath, there is already a strain of something dark, malignant. Just how bitter it would become, we didn't know.

#### 4

In 1987, I broke free from the draconian university entrance-exam system and enrolled in college. People in this city are manufactured and canned, raised for the sole purpose of taking tests and making money. The eighteen-year-old me went through the high-grade production line and was processed in three years, despite the fact that I was pure carrion inside.

That fall, in October, I moved into a second-floor apartment on Wenzhou Street. The leaseholders were a married couple who had graduated a few years earlier. They gave me a room with a huge window overlooking an alley. The two rooms across from mine were rented by two sisters. The young married couple was always in the living room watching TV. They spent a fair amount of time on the coffee-colored sofa. "We got married our senior year," they told me, smiling. But most of the time, they didn't say a word. The sisters would spend all night in one of their rooms watching a different channel. Passing the door, you'd hear bits of lively conversation. I never saw my housemates unless I had to. Just came and went on my own. Everyone kept to themselves.

So despite the five of us living together under one roof, it might as well have been a deaf home.

I lived in solitude. Lived at night. I'd wake up at midnight and ride my bike – a red Giant – to a nearby store where I'd buy dried noodles, thick pork soup, and spring rolls. Then I'd come home

and read while I ate. Take a shower, do laundry. In my room, there was neither the sound of another human being nor light. I'd write in my journal all night, or just read. I became obsessed with Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer. I devoured all kinds of books for tortured souls. Started collecting issues of the independence movement's weekly. Studied up on political game theory, an antidote to my spiritual reading. It made me feel like an outsider, which became my way of recharging. At the break of dawn, around six or seven, like a nocturnal creature afraid of the light, I'd finally lay my head – which by then was spilling over with thoughts – down onto the comforter.

That's how it went when things were good. Most of the time, however, I didn't eat a single thing all night. Didn't shower. Couldn't get out of bed. Didn't write in my journal or talk. Didn't read a single page or register the sound of another human being. All day long, I'd cry myself sick into my pillow. Sleep was just another luxury.

Didn't want anyone around. People were useless to me. Didn't need anyone. I started hurting myself and getting into all sorts of trouble.

Home was a credit-card bill footed by Nationalist Party voters. I didn't need to go back. Being in college gave me a sense of vocation. It exempted me from an oppressive system of social and personal responsibility – from going through the motions like a cog, from being whipped and beaten by everyone for not having worked hard enough and then having to put on a repentant face afterward. That system had already molded me into a flimsy, worthless shell. It drove my body to retreat into a self-loathing soul, and what's even scarier is that nobody knew or seemed to recognize it. My social identity was comprised of these two distinct, co-existing constructs. Each writhed toward me with its incessant demands – though when it came down

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to it, I spent more time getting to know my way around the supermarket next door than I did getting comfortable in my own skin.

Didn't read the paper. Didn't watch TV. Didn't go to class – except for gym, because the teacher took attendance. Didn't go out and didn't talk to my roommates. The only time I ever spoke at all was in the evenings or afternoons at the Debate Society, where I would go to preen my feathers and practice social intercourse. All too soon I realized that I was an innately beautiful peacock and decided that I shouldn't let myself go. However lazy, a peacock still ought to give its feathers a regular preening, and having been bestowed with such a magnificent set, I couldn't help but seek the mainstream of society as a mirror. With that peacock swagger, it was hard to resist indulging in a little strutting, but that's how it went, and it was a fundamentally bad habit.

The fact is, most people go through life without ever living. They say you have to learn how to construct a self who remains free in spite of the system. And you have to get used to the idea that it's every man for himself in this world. It requires a strange self-awareness, whereby everything down to the finest detail must be performed before the eyes of the world.

Since there's time to kill, you have to use boredom to get you to the other side. In English, you'd say: *Break on through*. That's more like it.

## 5

So she did me wrong. If my old motto was *I'm sentencing her to the guillotine*, my new motto contained a revelation: *The power to construct oneself is destiny*. If only it weren't for you, Shui Ling. In spite of everything, the truth is I still can't take it. I can't take it. Really, I can't. No matter how far I've come, it's never far enough. The pattern was already in place.

It must have been around October 1987. I was

biking down Royal Palm Boulevard and passed somebody. I remembered it was their birthday. It was at that precise moment that all of my pent-up grief and fear hit me at once. I knew more or less that I'd been rejected, and that was the bottom line. But somehow, I was convinced I had to get even.

She'd just turned twenty. I'd turned eighteen five months earlier. She and some friends from high school walked past me, and I managed to glance at her. But as for what significance that glance held, it was as if my whole life had flashed before my eyes. Though they were off in the distance, I could still feel the glow of her smile. It left me with the acute sense that she never failed to elicit the adoration and affection of others, that she was someone who radiated a pure, childlike contentment.

Even now I'm still in awe of her innate power to command such devotion – not only her charms but how it felt to be deprived of them. She maintained only a handful of friendships. In the past, the people around her had clung dearly to her, giving her their entire attention. She didn't need any more of that, but she didn't have much of a choice. She was trapped and suffocating. Whenever I was around her, I'd become clingy, too. If I wasn't by her side, I felt distant from other people, when in fact she was the one who was distant. That's how it worked. It was her natural gift.

I didn't see her my entire senior year of high school. I was careful to avoid her. Didn't dare take the initiative, though I longed for her to notice me in the crowd. An upperclassman and my senior, she was an ominous character, a black spade. To shuffle and draw the same card again would be even more ominous.

## 6

The lecture hall for Introduction to Chinese Literature was packed. I got there late and had

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to sheepishly lift my chair up higher than the rostrum and carry it all the way to the front row. The professor stopped lecturing, and all the other sheep turned and gawked at me and my antics.

Toward the end of class, someone passed a note from behind: *Hey, can I talk to you after class? Shui Ling.* She had sought me out. I knew it would happen. Even if I had switched to a different section, she would have sought me out all the same. She who hid in the crowd, who didn't want anyone to see her with her aloofness and averted eyes. When I stepped forward, she stepped out, too. And she had pointed with a child's wanton smile and said, "I want that one." There was no way I could refuse. And like a potted sunflower that had just been sold to a customer, I was taken away.

This, from a beautiful girl whom I was already deeply, viscerally attracted to. Things were getting good. There she was, standing right in front of me. She brushed the waves of hair away from her face with a seductiveness that painfully seared my heart like a tattoo. Her feminine radiance was overpowering. I was about to get knocked out of the ring. It was clear from that moment on, we'd never be equals. How could we, with me under the table, scrambling to summon a different me, the one she would worship and put on a pedestal? No way was I coming out.

"What are you doing here?" I was so anxious that I had to blurt something out. She didn't say a word or seem the least bit embarrassed.

"Did you switch to this section to make up a class?" She didn't look up at me. She just stood there, dragging one foot behind her in the hallway, and didn't say a thing, as if this one-sided conversation had nothing to do with her.

"How'd you know I switched?" Abruptly, she broke her silence. Her eyes were shimmering with amazement, and I could finally meet them. She was now looking right at me, wide-eyed.

"Well, of course I'd know!" I didn't want her to think I'd been noticing her. "You finally said something!" I said, heaving an exaggerated sigh of relief. She smiled at me shyly, even teasingly, and I let out a huge laugh, relieved that I'd made her smile. The glow on her face was like rays of sunshine along a golden beach.

She told me that she'd started to feel nervous as soon as I walked into the room. She wanted to talk to me, but didn't know what to say. I pointed to her shoelaces. She gingerly leaned forward to tie them. She said when she saw me, she couldn't bring herself to speak, and then she didn't want to say anything, so then she just stood there. She threw her purple canvas backpack over her shoulder and crouched on the floor. As she started talking, I felt the sudden urge to reach over and touch her long hair, which looked so soft and supple. You don't know a thing, but I figured it all out in an instant, I told her silently in my heart. I reached over and held her backpack instead, and feeling mildly contented by the closeness of its weight, wished that she would go on tying her shoes.

It was already six when class ended. Shadows had lengthened across the campus, and the evening breeze lilted in the air. We grabbed our bikes and headed off together. We took the main thoroughfare on campus, keeping with the leisurely pace of the traffic on the wide open road. I didn't know if I was following her, or if she was following me. Within a year, the two of us would come to cherish our ambiguous rapport, at once intimate and unfamiliar, and tempered by moments of silent confrontation.

"Why'd you come over and talk to me?" In my heart I already knew too much but pretended to know nothing.

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# TANGUT INN

## 西夏旅館

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### LOU YI-CHUN 駱以軍

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- Category: Literary Fiction
  - Publisher: Ink
  - Date: 10/2008
  - Rights contact:  
booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
  - Pages: 780
  - Length: 470,000 characters  
(approx. 329,000 words in English)
- 

**L**ou Yi-Chun has been a household name in literary circles for decades already. A past attendee of the Iowa Writers Program, he has won the China Times Open Book Award and the UDN Grand Literary Award several times, and presented his literary and critical work on public stages around the world.



\* 2008 China Times Open Book Award

\* 2008 Asia Weekly Top Ten Chinese Novel of the Year

\* 2009 Golden Tripod Award - Literature

As the award list shows, this story of intrigue, history, and memory represents one of literary star Lou Yi-Chun's most acclaimed works to date. A young man on a journey to find the truth behind his wife's murder finds himself lodging at a motel of endless rooms, which are filled with people and stories both familiar and foreign. This labyrinth of unreliable images still leads the protagonist to the story of his wife's death, and unveils his own true character to the reader.

Lou Yi-Chun's narrative shifts not only between speakers but also between historical eras and modes of speaking, blending myth and history with first-person experience. He brings the reader as far back as the Mongol invasion of the Tangut kingdom, revisiting the tale of the Tangut king murdering his seven concubines before Mongol horsemen arrive.

Allegories of occupation and invasion intertwine with a story of personal redemption as Lou Yi-Chun crafts a tale out of many different fabrics. Lou's stylistic mastery will engage you; the depth yet tactile immediacy of the tale will make you stay.

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# TANGUT INN

By Lou Yi-Chun

Translated by Pingta Ku

## ROOM 01 SUMMER INN

Back then he was so young that he relished a fresh solitude while booking the room, lying alone, and waking up the next morning in that cheap inn, without feeling the fatigue and pain brewing from his long journey and the alien bed. That dark crimson duvet soaked in others' body odor, that dusty grey monk's cap thermos with plastic shells and silvering flasks, that dwarf table upon which a stainless steel tray held several upside-down glasses stamped with scarlet letters: HeySong Sarsaparilla, that quasi-décor of a mini TV set on whose screen blurred figures flowed as he switched between channels, that isolated dummy-heavy Kolin A/C unit with vent-blades buried under the thick dust of dead termites.... Every single item in that termite-stricken room vaguely invoked his fantasy to fuck a hooker in an alien land. He was so young that memories failed to crush him, and he could blend into any townscape once he'd stepped onto an empty lane; he was in a vulgar room without history, cozily infusing his body odor into a houseful of cool moldy scent.

Waking up early in the morning, he, still undressed, pushed open the heavy casement window whose turpentine still smelled fresh. He was shocked by the sudden sight of a young shaman with a fiery scary face. Standing on a concrete floor – possibly part of someone's backyard, or a community playground – the shaman rolled his eyes and stared up at him.

He stepped back to the room permeated by his own body odor. *No way, the temple fair's parade starts so early?* He sat at the edge of the mattress that had lost its spring, reached the bedside mini fridge for a pop-top Taiwan Beer he'd bought at an express coach station the previous day. Beer was lukewarm. He realized the fridge was unplugged. As if making fun of his good humor at a fucked-up moment, he mimicked those mature men in movies, shook his head slightly with a bitter smile, pulled the pop-top, drank a great mouthful of lukewarm beer, and lit up a cigarette, filling his exhausted body with pungent smoke.

He heard a baby's shrill cry from the corridor and a woman's choppy, husky hiss. He strode towards the door in a cheap pair of brown slippers, but couldn't figure out what the woman was saying. She had a sexy, smoky voice and reminded him of a couple of maternal aunts whom everyone called "wild geese": like gypsies, they were removed from family albums, "went bad" in their teens, toured with cancan bands or cha-cha'd with gringos in Taipei's nighttown. They smoked and drank like hell but never seemed to get drunk. Nah, maybe alcohol had already poisoned their veins. Their voices had been hopelessly eroded by nicotine and alcohol by the time he met them, and they spoke to his elders with a withered yet deadly sweet accent: "My dear brother." Their features were chiseled, their skin nicely tanned, their hair burnt and yellowish, their shoulders wide, and their

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slim, well-curved legs perfectly suited to black stockings and stilettos no matter their age. When he grew older, he started to wonder where this multiracial species of seductive women came from, because his “aunties” suddenly vanished from the face of the earth after the “new look” of futuristic metallic bodies and bleached, chubby cheeks conquered every cover of fashion magazines.

The telephone in the room rang. It was a time long before mobile phones became popular and radio waves turned others into omnipresent intruders. He was indeed confused and anxious when the telephone rang. Who the hell would know he was *here*? He remembered walking aimlessly for a long way the day before he checked in. Soaked with sweat, he came up with the idea, “well, tonight I’ll be staying here, in this inn.” He was an untraceable nomad among a ghost population. How could someone possibly have tracked him to this room and called the phone?

He picked up the receiver, holding his breath.

Excuse me, said a female voice on the other end.

The beep bursting from the wet, short-circuited landline blocked him from the other side of the world. Nothing but a couple of ghostly function-words: *Excuse me*, is it X’s room.... *Excuse me*, I’m looking for Mr Y.... *Excuse me*, would you like to keep your room or check out.... *Excuse me*, are you hiring a hooker....

But the voice just repeated the phrase: *Excuse me*.

Sorry? He asked in confusion, but the call disconnected.

It appeared to him that the entire message was “Excuse me.” But what the hell did that mean?

The day before he checked in, he’d meandered down a seaside road that steamed like a shapeless black pudding in order to escape his friend W and two girls from another inn in a coastal town where

trains seldom stopped. No, don’t get it wrong, it had nothing to do with the licentious, two-horny-couples-in-a-room type of orgy that you might imagine. At the time, their hopeless awkwardness with the opposite sex almost choked them. An imaginary superego censored every word they said and every move they made. There were two single beds in the room, so W and he huddled together in one bed and left the other for the girls. On a journey like that, they gladly carried an acoustic guitar with nylon strings. During the day, they took the national express coach to a desolate beach. They impersonated lovers in dated young adult films: the boys played ducks and drakes, and skipping flat pebbles across the immense water, whereas the girls walked into the waves, lifted their skirts with feigned carefreeness, splashed and chuckled. At night, they got stuck in the small room, and the boys performed their poor repertoire on the guitar: “Spring Breeze,” “Greensleeves,” “Romance de Amor,” “Scarborough Fair,” “Yesterday”.... The girls listened to the tunes for a short while, and then gossiped and giggled and rolled around in their tiny bed.

What a beautiful freeze-frame in a stranded time. But they were too innocent to twiddle with the immense twilight zone between etiquette and Eros. The boys were so anxious that they exhausted their poor repertoire for the first night. What could they do for the nights to come? Just like him, his friend W had no experience with girls at all. The girls were more worldly-wise. Both were trying to forget unhappy love affairs. The two mysterious male images that sporadically popped out of the girls’ self-indulgent recollection appeared much older than they were; for the boys, that was a distant unknown world on the other end of the “tunnel to adulthood.” The boys had no idea at all how a man could be so unfeeling; neither did they understand how a man (as they would become many years later) could stand aside and watch

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with derision as his lover competed against other women, while calmly peeping at their shapely-curved legs, seductive eyes, or upskirt wonders.

Etiquette and decorum. Back in the old days, all they could do in that dim, boring room was tell absurd stories about themselves to conceal the fact that they knew nothing about love. The girl named Phoenix was three years older than the trio, and seemed much more immersed in that all-devouring, violent, in-your-face theater of the adult world; she was absentmindedly enjoying a carefree time-out with innocent boys. Phoenix was gorgeous: slant-eyed, slender-limbed, dark-skinned, and evocative of the extinct species of weathered yet seductive beauties with a husky voice. Her body and soul had not yet been eroded by irredeemable misfortune when she met the boys. She had a mysterious tolerance for men and all their defects: ostentatiousness, tendency to form cliques, lust, foolishness, gambling addiction.... She often warned him and W in a teasing voice: "You're both good lads, but you will become like them one day." She was a lazy, laid-back listener. Both boys had a crush on her, but they kept it to themselves. They could sense that she hung out with them only to heal an old wound and exile herself from love. Like two cubs with a keen sense of smell, they knew she would go for a man sooner or later – a man of means in the "normal world" – and resume her role as a mistress only to get dumped again.

The other girl's name was Jen. Jen was a classmate whom he never got to know, until one day when he and W (who had just finished military service and was staying with him while he re-took the university entrance exam) flirted with her as they bought cigarettes in a next-door convenience store where she worked part-time. Since then, W always said, "Let's get some skewers and beer and go to Jen's place to shoot the breeze."

It was at Jen's place that they had several chance encounters with Phoenix and got to know her.

Many years later, when he thought of the four of them and their dreamlike frolics in that tiny inn, he couldn't help but think: if I had met Jen in another place or another time, maybe she would've been more charming than Phoenix. Jen was so young that her face, her neck, shoulders and her body all converged into a single, fluid curve like a spindle. She was a much better storyteller than Phoenix. All their vague knowledge of Phoenix came from fragments of heartbreaking stories Jen told them. He believed Jen told Phoenix his and W's stories in the same manner as she told them hers. They also heard stories from Jen, bit by bit, about friends or strangers. Her manner when speaking was reminiscent of those old toys in their childhood grocery stores: simple, clean, straight-to-the-heart. For instance, she would say: That poor boy in your class, I tell you, had been suffering from demonic sleep paralysis for more than a year, so he was flaking out all the time and the boundary between nightmares and reality became blurred. Or, she would tell the story about a senior who bumped into a mountain deity by the river when he was a child....

Jen had a rare gift for making people laugh, but the tiny room and their superficial friendship stifled her opportunity to shine as a charmer. She ended up a funny shadow of Phoenix, a parasite that fed on Phoenix's seductive femininity, or a deft agent who stood between Phoenix and the boys. Sometimes she betrayed Phoenix's darkest secrets in a deadpan tone, but at the next second she would rebuke herself and defend Phoenix like mad.

How did he break away from that flytrap? The desperate foursome vibrated their wings only to sink deeper into a black hole. He remembered the night he and W slept on one single bed, Phoenix and Jen on the other. That

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was the very first night of their journey, and Jen seemed aroused by the intimacy of a graduation trip. Though they spent the whole night telling stories and jokes, Jen remained awake and excited, spouting gibberish continuously. Every now and then W, who slept next to the girls' bed, answered Jen with a bad joke or two, and she would stick her leg out of the duvet and kick the boys' bed.

Though he succumbed to an overwhelming drowsiness, he still heard the girls whispering in his dreams. In the small hours, he was awakened by a horrible hallucinatory sound of a giant falcon beating its wings. In darkness he heard Phoenix sobbing, and, when his dilated pupils became able to detect blurry figures in the dark room, he realized that Jen was sitting at the edge of the bed with her back towards Phoenix. He heard Jen say to Phoenix in an old woman's wearisome tone: "I've had enough of being your keeper."

He fell asleep again, but he saw everything clearly in his dreams. The next morning, Jen had completely transformed. Her youthful spindle-like face became somber overnight, her quirkiness devoured by a dead silence. W, with extreme care, teased her with jokes, but she just scowled at him and formed an almost inaudible phrase with her lips: "Shut up."

W exploded in rage. He heard W roaring out loud an old-fashioned yet sashaying line: "What do you want? An egg in your beer?"

Jen stood up and stumbled. He thought her face would puff up like a dough with too much yeast, but she just stumbled out of the room. He became an onlooker. Phoenix said to W, "I explained everything to her last night." Then he felt an unbearable pain, as if his guts were soaked in acid. So this was jealousy. Many years later he would better understand that it was a dark, meaningless emotion set alight neither by love nor sentiment. He finally realized that they had never been an innocently happy foursome.

Phoenix and W had become lovers behind his and Jen's backs, and Jen had had a crush on W all along. He was the third wheel in their game. He told Phoenix and W that he would appease Jen and sort it out, and then he went after Jen. He found her curled up and crying in the corner of a telephone booth outside the inn. He looked down at the sobbing girl, and watched the brittle hair, tied in a bun, quiver as she cried. He whispered in his head, *how ugly she is*, yet what his mouth uttered was: "I can be your boyfriend if you don't mind."

Jen looked up at him in disgust, as if he were a monster. Then he left the inn, walked through that long burning coastal lane which almost melted his soles into caramel, found this remote town, and checked into this inn.

Around noon, he left his room and saw a little boy nestled against the staircase. Was he the boy who cried in the corridor earlier? The boy's face was flushed, and he seemed to be running a fever. Beside him stood a shoe-shining machine. He was confused: *How come there's a posh gadget like this in such a decrepit inn?* He took some coins from his pocket, and, under the boy's curious gaze, threw them into the machine. The machine featured three motor-driven brushes, each of which was specified as "dust removal," "dark colors," and "bright colors." The coins he'd thrown in made the machine run for eternity. He put each shoe into the holes, had them dusted off and shined, and then enticed the boy to do the same. The boy put his little canvas shoes into the machine and started to giggle.

He and the boy stood in the cool shade of the inn's corridor for a long time, doing nothing but stare at those three brushes of different colors spinning and spinning.

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# THE SUMMER GENERAL WINTER CAME

## 冬將軍來的夏天

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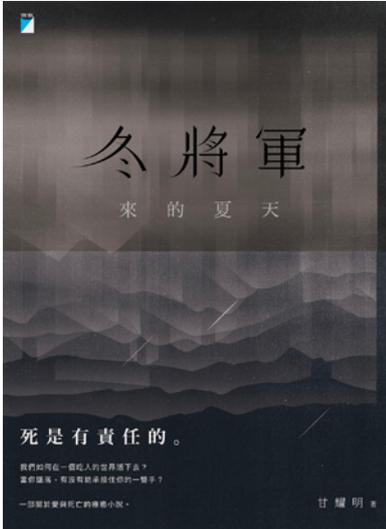


KAN YAO-MING  
甘耀明

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**K**an Yao-Ming is hailed as Taiwan's foremost "Neo Nativist" writer, successfully mixing farce, tall tales, folk legend and collective memories to create his own uniquely magic realist world. Like a magician of words, he writes with a highly experimental but always accessible style. Kan's reputation was first built on two collections of short stories, *The Mysterious Train*, and *The School of The Water Spirit*, and later *Tales at a Funeral*. His work has won numerous awards and is often chosen for "Best of the Year" anthologies. He is two-time winner of the China Times Open Book Award.



When pain and misfortune seemingly escalate beyond the limits of reality, a twisted and unreal narrative may be best suited to describe them. In this unsettling novel of contemporary irreality, author Kan Yao-Ming resurrects the dead to defend the living.

Kindergarten teacher Huang Li-Hua gets drunk at a staff party and is raped by a male colleague. She goes immediately to the police, and from there to court, but her difficulty in proving the sex was non-consensual leads to frustration, failure, and ridicule. Unable to bear the hostile stares of those around her, Huang Li-Hua tries her best to abandon her life and environs.

Her only protector in the process turns out to be her long-dead grandmother, whose spirit appears, folded in a trunk, three days before Li-Hua's assault. Once released, Li-Hua's grandmother brings Li-Hua into strange company: the "Past Lives Society," a group of dead old women who travel around convincing lonely elderly souls to join them. On the road, the women share the stories of their lives and deaths, stories that will change Li-Hua's own life forever.

Dark clouds loom over Kan Yao-Ming's unreal world, in which brutality and loneliness are frequent visitors. Yet in it we see how tragedy can serve as antidote to tragedy, and how narrative provides the energy for sustaining life.

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# THE SUMMER GENERAL WINTER CAME

By Kan Yao-Ming

Translated by Jeremy Tiang

That summer, Grandma climbed out of the wooden chest in the living room, and formally entered our household.

After I got back from being examined at the hospital, I told Mother I wanted a companion to get me through the court case, and that person was Grandma. “The reason you hallucinate ‘that woman’ in the living room isn’t a coincidence, she wouldn’t appear unless you were thinking of her.”

“Oh please, that was just a stray thought,” my mother retorted. “I’m always saying ‘to hell with it,’ but that doesn’t mean I want visitors from Hell, especially not ‘that woman.’”

“I miss Granny, I really do,” I said.

“We haven’t set eyes on each other for more than ten years.” Mother was silent for a while. “All right! To hell with it, unless she really has some sort of unearthly power and can appear just like that.”

I walked over to the wooden chest and flung the lid open to reveal Grandma, neatly folded within. Mother was terrified, her gaze plunging into the emptiness of a person unaccustomed to illusion. She clutched at her hair and sighed deeply, letting out all the unhappiness within. “Now I’m in for it,” she yelped.

Of course, this made no sense; nor did Grandma.

Grandma was silent in the box, her body still neatly stacked so her legs bent over her shoulders with her feet by her ears, her hands tucked behind her bum, her whole body filling

the space as perfectly as pickled vegetables in a jar, leaving no air at all. Her eyes were full of life, wide open and staring out at the world from that squashed face. The abrupt opening of the chest wasn’t a reunion Grandma and her former daughter-in-law were prepared for, and their relationship could only be an unwholesome one.

Unfolding herself, Grandma stuck her head out of the box. Querulously, she said, “I heard it all. Everything you said about me.”

“And I see you. So?” Mother was holding a cigarette. She normally only smoked on the balcony, but was now so stressed she didn’t care which room she was in.

“I didn’t miss a single sentence. Not a single word.”

“That sounds bad.”

“You’ve never had one good word for me,” said Grandma. “If you spent that much time in this chest, you’d hear plenty of bad things about yourself too, of course.”

“What did I say about you?”

“I haven’t forgotten, I just wanted to make you repeat it all. Don’t worry, I’ve been cultivating myself. Say it again, and maybe you’ll feel better. You could start with how stingy I used to be. I’ll admit I could often be like that. It’s completely fair.”

“Those are all tiny incidents, not worth mentioning.” Mother took a long drag, sucking in both her cheeks violently, looking uneasy.

“Say it! You’ll feel better when you’ve said it. Come on, tell us about these old scores!”

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Mother took another drag on her cigarette, with the look of someone throwing caution to the winds, and put her foot on the gas. She said, when she was in her confinement month after giving birth, Grandma went through the gifts that arrived, ripping open packages and picking through them, taking away anything she had a use for. A box of Japanese peaches got whisked away, with the excuse that new mothers shouldn't eat "cooling" foods. Same with a blanket, which she claimed was unsuitable for an infant. The SebaMed, Benber, and Les Enphants brand bath sets were taken too, as they were "incomplete." Then the necklaces and other gold jewelry from Mother's own family were tucked away. Grandma said it was for safekeeping, but somehow that became taking them for herself.

"That's all true. What else?"

"There's more!" Mother pressed her victory, and brought up Grandma's policy of laundry only once every three days, so the clothes got all moldy and set off Mother's allergies. Then there were the other rules: don't open the fridge more than five times a day; no air conditioning except on the sweatiest summer days; lights off and bedtime before 11 p.m., and a strict \$500 limit on daily expenditures, with frequent inspections of her bankbook for any larger withdrawals.

"Also, no phone calls longer than two minutes, time limits on TV viewing, only so many lamps on at the same time. Is that all?"

"Of course that's not all!" But Mother suddenly grew cautious, and changed her tune. "I'm done."

"Now you've got that off your chest, you'll feel better."

"No such luck."

"I have a story about that." Grandma shot me a look. "There's a type of baby that's born with the soul of its past life. It only loses that soul at eight or nine months, when it learns to speak. The legend is that before they start talking, these babies have the spirit of 'the listening tree.'"

Mother's frosty expression suddenly thawed, and a faint smile crossed her face. It only lasted a second, and if I hadn't happened to be looking at her, I wouldn't have noticed that momentary flicker of happiness before her icy look returned.

"The listening tree?" I tried to get her to go on.

"When something bad happens that you can't talk to anyone about, you go into the forest, find a big tree with a hole in it, and speak all your unhappiness into that hole, until you feel better, until you've cheered yourself up. Then you fill in the hole with dirt."

I'd heard of listening trees. This story was quite common, though its origins were impossible to trace. Anyway, it's the sort of anecdote that appears in self-help books; I could find a dozen examples in any library. As for the point of this story, it's not about pouring your painful secrets out to the tree, but receiving the healing energy of the forest as you search for it.

Grandma said, "Listening trees eventually get sick and die. After helping countless people, and earning their full measure of good karma, they receive permission from the Buddha to be reincarnated as humans. They become little babies, but retain the special characteristics of their listening-treedom, right up until they learn to talk. And so, adults can tell their deepest secrets to these kids who don't yet have language."

"And?" I said.

"You were a listening tree," said Grandma. "You were definitely too young to remember any of that, but we do. Your mom would tell you all kinds of things, and so would your dad. You were their listening tree."

My cheeks broadened in a smile. Mother had never told me any of this, and if Grandma hadn't mentioned it, the entire story would surely have dispersed like smoke. This fragment of the past made me think of other things. I'd been through all the phases of childhood: a little kid constantly

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clamoring to know “why do leaves fall in the autumn?” and “why is the elephant’s nose so long?”; then a middle school student, screaming “Go to Hell!” as I snacked on candies and raisins; then a high school student, headphones clamped permanently over my ears and refusing to hear the world. None of these things would prevent me from getting my listening abilities back. But I had been too eager to speak, to have other people hear my words.

“I’ve been cultivating myself. I have listening tree powers now,” said Grandma, nodding. “The longer I live, the more I become like a little child.”

“And me?” Mother demanded shrilly. “I’m nothing at all, I’m not cultivated enough to face a tree, or even to see what’s so cultivated about a tree like you.”

“I suppose I’m not able to show a more enlightened side of myself, but I do have listening abilities. At least I can now hear you out without getting angry,” said Grandma.

“Fine! So you have the cultivation of a tree, but that doesn’t mean I must. I’m certain that the two of us can’t live under the same roof. It’s too dangerous. You might not lose your mind, but I will.”

Mother drew a line in the sand. It didn’t matter if Grandma had learned to be superb at contortion or being a listening tree, nothing was going to fix their relationship. Past arguments guaranteed that. Life is never that neat. After all, if you yank a carrot out of the ground, you can’t just stick it back into the same hole again; if you tried, it wouldn’t grow, and might even die. Mother was willing to beat a hasty retreat and temporarily move in with her boyfriend, so I could be with Grandma.

“But the main reason,” said Mother just before she stepped out the door, “is that you believe I killed your son. You’ll never see me as anything other than a murderer. Isn’t that right?”

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The cassia trees were in full bloom when I left my kindergarten teaching job.

The cassias grew by the sand pit, and in early summer would droop with strings of flowers that the slightest breeze made rain down golden petals, beautiful against the pale sand. The kids called these trees “pig intestines,” because the seeds came in long, pitch-black pods. They’d creep up behind someone and say, “Hey, you dropped something.” When the victim turned round, they’d hold a pod high and holler, “Your pig intestine dropped out of your bum.” Even visitors and the principal got pranked in this way.

This trick and the nickname for the pods were invented by Rook. He also caused an incident by opening some of the ripe ones, and scraping the black goo inside into a pot to make a “witch’s brew,” which he then invited his friends to sample, claiming it would give them Pikachu’s “100,000-volt” kung fu skills. Only thing was, if any of them dared to breathe a word about it, they’d dissolve into foam in a cesspit, just like the little mermaid.

The cassia fruit tastes sweet, and causes mild diarrhea when eaten, though it’s otherwise non-toxic. After school, a dozen bums so youthful their Mongolian spot birthmarks hadn’t faded yet gushed their inner contents into a dozen bathrooms at home, and not one of them daring to mention the “witch’s brew,” for fear of turning into the yellow scum floating atop the toilet bowl. Their parents suspected some sort of stomach flu and rushed them to hospital, where the doctors said bowel diseases don’t lead to diarrhea, and this was probably food poisoning.

The parents discussed this in their Line group, and came to the conclusion that the kindergarten must be to blame, and probably hadn’t been handling food properly. The principal held a parents’ meeting and wrote two letters of apology. When they still weren’t able to

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trace the source of the illness, a kitchen worker was fired to appease their anger. The children were pleased with the results of the “witch’s brew” and also with how well they’d kept this secret. This morphed into an urban legend that “eating pudding and instant ramen at the same time gives you the shits.” Afterwards, though, Rook told me the truth. He’d never kept any secrets from me.

One Monday in July, as the cassia blossoms swung from the branches and blanketed the sand pit, the kids were playing a treasure-hunting game below the trees, seeing who could dig up the most Minions, which were buried deep in the sand. The teacher who was with them said even if they dug right through the whole planet and ended up in America, they’d have to find the Minions there too. No stopping till they’d unearthed them all. Their childish whoops rang non-stop through the air. There was nothing they liked better than playing treasure-hunt in the sandbox.

Rook tossed his shovel aside, yelled that he had a stomachache, and hurtled off towards the toilet.

I noticed he’d hidden all the Minions he’d found so far in his pocket, and was sure this was some kind of ruse. I followed him to investigate.

Rook ran past the toilet towards the storeroom, opening the three-digit combination lock without any trouble. The lock wasn’t much of a deterrent, anyway; the combination was carved into the door frame at an adult’s eye level. They’d only installed it three years ago, after a few kids broke in to steal some whiteboard marker ink, which they smeared all over the school and themselves.

I peeped through the window and saw Rook frantically searching the dusty storeroom. Maybe he wanted a hiding place for the Minions in his pocket, so he could make up yet another story about how they’d been swallowed by the pit.

I walked in. “Need any help?”

Seeing it was me, he dropped his guard and kept searching. “Where are the pig intestines?”

Each spring, we gathered all the ripe cassia pods and kept them in the storeroom, for use in art class – the kids stuck them into scrapbooks, made decorative borders around notice boards, or lined them up like train tracks. There were all sorts of things you could do with them.

“Was it you who pulled off the ones on the notice board?” I now asked.

“Yes!”

“You must already have quite a few. But you still need some more?”

“I do!”

“What for?”

“To make a new batch of witch’s brew. A bigger one.”

“And what will you do with your witch’s brew?” Remembering the last occasion, I grew alert.

“It’s a secret. I can’t tell you.”

“I thought you told me everything.”

“It’s good for people to have secrets, now and then. My daddy always yells at my mommy for looking at his phone without permission. He says she doesn’t respect his privacy.” Rook frowned. “Privacy means secrets. My daddy has secrets, and so do I. Grown-ups have secrets. Having no secrets means you’re just a kid.”

“Ah! Rook, you’ve grown up.” I looked at him, thinking how he would soon graduate kindergarten and enter elementary school, which wouldn’t be that much of a change, but Rook himself was transforming. He smiled much less than before, and was becoming warier.

“How about this,” he said, looking up at me. “Let’s play swapping secrets. We’ll trade ideas. It’s fair that way.”

I agreed. This was a little game, and I’d be able to hold my own.

“What is rape?” he asked.

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# AWAITING THE MOON

## 待月記

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## LIU DAN-CHIU 柳丹秋

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Originally a theater major, Liu Dan-Chiu integrates the language of the internet with the language of literature. Her blog-form novella “Upstream,” which upended stereotypical views of the *otaku* lifestyle, garnered significant attention from the reading public and won the first TSMC Literature Award in 2011. Liu is currently a doctoral candidate in Japan.



This is the story of outsiders looking out for each other, a novel that perfectly embodies the ancient Chinese phrase: “Only the wronged ever get together.” Ching-Yueh is an engineer, whose job was ensuring that the cell phones his company made broke after a certain period. Angry disillusionment is compounded by sickness: his eyes become so sensitive to light that daylight exposure is painful, and constant torment drives him to thoughts of suicide. His posts on Facebook catch the attention of Feng, a college classmate who hiked with him on the Outing Club, and she decides to take emergency action.

This brave, forthright, and completely socially inept young woman infiltrates Ching-Yueh’s apartment, incapacitates him with a stun gun, and drives him into the mountains. If Ching-Yueh really wants to die, she says, let’s make a survival game out of it like we always said we would, and he can at least die well. He follows along with her, and the two begin their fight for survival in the wild – one depressed and passive, yet struggling to stay alive, the other energetic and active, yet persistently courting death.

Liu Dan-Chiu’s brilliantly eccentric characters shine with a rebellious energy that charges the novel with life and inspires a dark humor. The world as seen through Ching-Yueh’s tortured eyes explodes with contradiction and absurdity, and the drama of marginalization that plays out between him, Feng, and the world they try to abandon will feel painfully vivid. While the world of the narrative might feel most familiar to younger readers, the direct, hard-hitting prose will surely capture anyone’s attention.

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# AWAITING THE MOON

By Liu Dan-Chiu

Translated by Roddy Flagg

Feng pulled up in front of the apartment block the address had led her to. A seven-story building, no concierge, glass doors locked tight. She parked and hung around outside for a while. Nobody came in or out.

This wasn't a problem she'd anticipated.

She turned to the intercom, found the button for Ching-Yueh's apartment and tried pressing it. No response.

What if she was blowing it all out of proportion? What if she had the wrong apartment? What if some passing busybody asked what she was up to.... Negative thoughts welled up as usual and she forced them back down. If she'd gotten it wrong it would mean an embarrassment at worst. And she'd endured more than enough of those. Hadn't she already been through the worst?

Having reassured herself, Feng took a deep breath and started jabbing the intercom button, yelling upwards as she did so:

"Hey! Li Ching-Yueh! Boss! Can you hear me? It's me, Meibo. I know you're up there! Open the door! Let me up!"

No response.

"If you don't, I'll just keep shouting and shouting until your neighbors call the police."

That did the trick. The lock clicked open, and Feng walked through the lobby and into the elevator, where she pressed the button for the fourth floor. On arriving she left the wheelchair in the elevator and offered up a silent prayer for success.

She walked to the apartment. Her target had opened his door a crack and stood behind it, waiting.

"Hey, boss!" He made no sound, so she went on: "Long time no see!"

"Meibo. What are you making all that racket for?"

"Not my fault you didn't open the door quicker. For all I knew it was already too late. Why didn't you reply to me?"

"What, to that screed you sent me? You're lucky I even read all that nonsense."

"It wasn't nonsense. I was worried."

"Worry's not much use any more, the way things are."

"Well, you clearly want someone to worry about you, or you wouldn't be posting it all up on Facebook."

"You think it's all for show, just like the rest of them." His tone was ominous. "You can all wait and see, but it's not for show this time."

"That's not what I think. I know the charcoal and pan are for real. Why else would I have come?"

"Fine. Then worry. Worry all you want. Let's see you change my mind. Or maybe you've got some better method?"

He stood aside. Feng stepped past and found herself in gloom.

This was her first visit to the home of her frequently yet unsuccessfully suicidal friend, and she soon saw how far he'd gone. Flattened cardboard boxes blocked the windows; an unlit

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fluorescent tube seemed to have been obscured with cellophane; the only light came from a laptop screen. In that dim glow she made out a cluttered coffee table: electrical tape, scissors, a mobile phone, instant noodle containers, dark glasses, swimming goggles and several pairs of spectacles.

On the floor were bags of charcoal, strips of torn towel, and stainless steel pans. All the essentials for suicide by carbon monoxide.

“Those are the mountaineering club’s pans.”

“What if they are?”

“I remember using them. I miss that.”

“I wash my shoes in them now.”

Feng changed the topic: “I’m not here to try and change your mind, but we had an arrangement, remember? Like I said in my message, we promised each other we’d do the northern section of the Central Range together.”

“And?”

“Well, you keep on saying you want to die, but I think you should keep that promise before you do. I’ve got all the gear ready, all you need to do is get in the car. Assuming we get back safely, you can live or die. Your choice.”

Ching-Yueh gave a lengthy sigh. “Well, that’s a different approach to the doctors and therapists, at least. But I’m all set to light the charcoal here. If you wanted us to do that together, I might be interested. That was the first thing I thought when I saw you’d sent me a message.” An odd smile came to his lips. “I actually thought that was quite likely. I can better understand now what you were doing back then....”

Feng cut him off: “I’m here – I’m here today to ask you to come to the mountains.”

“If you’re just going to go on about that, forget it. Go home.”

“I...I’ve got some of our photos from back then. Maybe if you looked through them you’d remember how much you enjoyed it?” She rummaged through her backpack.

“Then leave them on the table on your way out.”

A sudden agony seized Ching-Yueh. He collapsed, limbs jerking in uncontrollable spasms.

Feng took huge, panicked breaths, an electric stun gun in her hand.

She swiftly carried out her plan of action, taping up first his mouth, and then his hands and feet with trembling fingers. Once he was immobilized she found something with which to prop open the door and went outside to call the elevator. Fortunately it was still waiting on the same floor, the wheelchair safe inside.

Back in the apartment, she unfolded the collapsible wheelchair and hoisted Ching-Yueh onto the seat. It had been ages since she’d manhandled anyone like this – back in her mountaineering days she’d helped carry other club members who’d succumbed to altitude sickness, and she had moved her father about during his recovery. Ching-Yueh seemed heavier than all of them, but she managed to wrestle him into position. She added a facemask, dark glasses and a baseball cap to cover his features and found a halfway respectable pair of sneakers for his feet. Finally, she draped a coat over his legs to hide the taped wrists.

She made sure the windows were closed and the gas and water off, then looked for his medicines. It wasn’t hard – the place was littered with blister packs and dropper bottles of eye medicine. There was no time to look at them carefully, so she just swept them into her bag.

Last of all the computer. She felt sure she would be the only one responding to yet another of Ching-Yueh’s suicide messages, but just in case.... She opened Facebook and referred to her draft as she typed:

*I haven’t been thinking very clearly lately, but I’ve changed my mind. I’m going to spend some time alone to work things out. Don’t worry if you can’t reach me.*

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*I'm just going to go away and try and forget about myself for a while.*

Even getting out of the building went quite smoothly, in that they didn't run into anyone. Getting down the two steps from the elevator and getting Ching-Yueh into the car was difficult, though. She was coming to realize just how much a pain the lack of disabled access infrastructure could be.

By the time she'd fixed him there in the passenger seat, mummy-like under layer upon layer of tape, she was drenched, soaked through with sweat. She collapsed limp and exhausted into the driver's seat.

She gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Don't worry, you know exactly where we're going," she said.

"Off we go then."

This was the message she'd written him:

*Hey, it's Meibo. Long time no see. I'll skip the formalities: I've seen what's been happening, and I wanted to ask if you remembered our promise to go north together? We both thought it'd be the perfect place to be laid to rest, so whoever lived longest would scatter the other's ashes from a mountain top.*

*In case you've forgotten, let me persuade you: if you really can't go on, we'll head up there and do Bear Grylls: Survival Game for real. You remember how we used to love watching it and talking about trying it ourselves one day, to see if it was all rubbish or not? Well, this is our chance. I don't think you really want to end it all, but I do think you need to obliterate your current self so you can have a whole new start. But you just can't see how. I think a survival experience will do. And if you're keen, I'll come along.*

*I wouldn't suggest this to anyone else, just you. You know your stuff, and even if something does go wrong, you'll be better off than you are now. You'll be where you wanted to be laid to rest. If you go ahead with your plans – think about whoever has to clean up after you, think about the apartment. All that's just going to*

*make you hate yourself even more.*

*I know the nights are tough and it's hard to think. So, I hope you take one morning, when you feel a bit calmer and the sun's shining, to think about it and reply.*

*I mean what I say – I'll stand by your side till the end. Go through your whole friends list, there's no one more loyal than me.*

## 2

Ching-Yueh had met Meibo through the university mountaineering club and hadn't liked her at first. She had an odd habit of calling all the men "sir," regardless of age or seniority, and he was sure it was a full six months before she learned to tell him apart from the others. It was a particular blue bandana printed with a map of Antarctica that he realized was his distinguishing feature. He always wore it, and if Meibo ever came looking for him in the cool of evening, when he'd put a woolen hat on over it, she'd walk right past him and wander, lost, around whatever mountain hamlet they had stopped at.

Meibo's freakish inability to recognize faces, along with her other oddities, made her headache for the team. But in the end, she was kept around as a kind of mascot. They even gave her a nickname: she was such a nag, always lecturing them or telling them it was time for bed at eight in the evening, they started to shut down her every instruction with an English "maybe", a mocking distortion of Meibo, and "Maybe" became her name. But some of the girls thought this was cruel, so "Maybe" became "Maple", which returned to Chinese as "Feng" for an instant boost of femininity.

Only Ching-Yueh stuck to calling her Meibo. As far as he was concerned, Feng was far too young and pretty a name for such an old crank, even an old crank disguised as a young woman. He shuddered so violently at the

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thought of calling her such a feminine name that his feet skittered about the floor. And she was easily the most troublesome member of the mountaineering team he led, one of the four making up the club. Not that he ever objected to being stuck with the weirdo. And over time she became a regular at the back of the group, preventing stragglers from falling too far behind.

For four years they climbed mountains together, until Ching-Yueh finished his postgrad and went off to national service and employment. By now, it had been five years since they'd last seen each other. Ching-Yueh couldn't imagine how the stickler for rules then become his abductor now. But she had always been an odd one, and he found himself surprised but not scared. Also curious as to what she had planned. He'd have been even more curious, had he not been taped firmly to the passenger seat and unable to resolve a certain pressing issue.

He started to struggle.

"Stop moving about, you'll distract me."

Feng glanced away from the road for a second to check the tape was holding fast. Head-shaking. Struggling.

"What's wrong? Not happy?"

More head-shaking.

"No? So what would you rather do?"

They were on a twisting mountain road. With nobody nearby to hear any screams of complaint, Feng reached over and pulled the tape from his mouth.

"My eyes! Are you trying to kill me?!"

"What's up?"

"You know! You read Facebook, you must know I can't stand sunlight. And you've taken me for a drive in the middle of the day!"

"Oh, I remember something about that. And you can't let yourself get worked up, either, can you? Aren't you getting worked up now?"

"Whose fault is that!? And you've taped my hands to my legs, they should be by my side. My eye pressure's going up, and my head is splitting!

Find somewhere shady to stop, quick!"

His complaints worked. Feng swung over to the side of the road, took out a penknife and cut through the tape, Ching-Yueh helping by frantically tearing it off as she went. Once she'd folded the blade and placed it safely in her bag he threw a punch at her shoulder, sending her head bouncing off the side window.

They both screamed in pain.

"What did you do that for?" she yelled.

"To get even!"

Ching-Yueh pulled his cap low over his eyes and exited the car, ignoring luxuriant silvergrass and wild cotton as he stumbled to the shade of a nearby tree and collapsed.

Feng staggered along behind, sighing as she sat beside him.

All was silent, bar the constant chirping of the cicadas surrounding.

Finally he spoke. "So...how have things been?"

"The usual."

"How's your dad? Still climbing?"

"Not any more, his back's not up to it." She paused a moment. "And you? Have you still been getting out there?"

"You think I can go up a mountain like this?"

"Why not?"

"I can barely get out of the house."

"That's just what you think."

"That's what everyone says, as if my thoughts aren't important. What are we, apart from thoughts?"

She had no reply to that.

"Well? I'm asking you a question! Fine, change the topic." He tried to think of something else to say, but his head was jangling, as if half the cicadas of summer had been lured inside and locked in there. "Your dad still climbing?"

She just stared at him.

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# LIGHTLESS

## 烏暗暝

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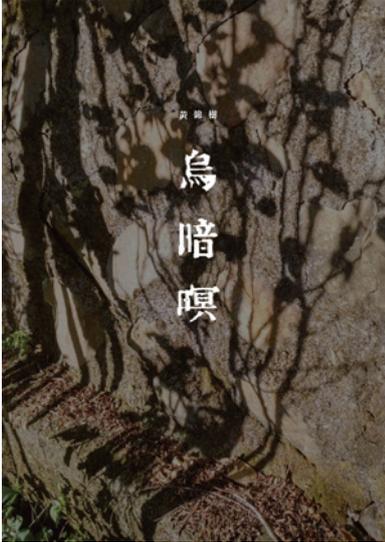
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### NG KIM CHEW 黃錦樹

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  - Publisher: Rye Field
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Prize-winning Malaysian Chinese author Ng Kim Chew was born in Johor, West Malaysia, and currently teaches Chinese literature at National Chi Nan University in Taiwan. His literary talent first came out into the open as a college student, when he published his first short stories, which by now fill nine published collections. A previous recipient of literary awards from the *United Daily* and *China Times*, he most recently received a Golden Tripod Award for his latest collection, *Rain*.



This edition of *Lightless* reprints together two collections of short fiction by Ng Kim Chew, one of Malaysia’s best-known authors. *Lightless* and *Dreams, Pigs, and Dawn*, originally published independently in 1994 and 1997, are brought together into a single volume containing the best work of a crucial voice from the international Sinophone world.

After years of studying classical Chinese literature at university, which he described as “shuffling through the remains of a dead culture inside an abandoned tomb,” Ng filled his stories with vivid scenes of contemporary Malaysia – forests of rubber trees, dark nights in the countryside, urgent dreams of human desire. These works, energized by stylistic experimentation and the anxieties of ethnic identity, set the Malaysian literary world on fire when they first appeared. And while the author, looking back twenty years later, has expressed dissatisfaction with his own writing, readers from both within and outside Chinese and Malaysian writing traditions will be deliciously surprised.

Stories like “M’s Disappearance,” “Death in the South,” and “A Sick Young Girl” transport the reader to a Malaysian homeland of Ng’s experience and imagination, where difficult dramas of tragedy, intrigue, and even farce are enacted.

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# LIGHTLESS

By Ng Kim Chew

Translated by Mary Bradley

## “M’s Disappearance”

The bamboo poles of the bridge reached up in a series of connected Vs like the ribs of a giant dinosaur skeleton. The poles, each one thick as an arm, supported the thigh-thick “spine” that rested at the base of the Vs, as well as bamboo poles above and parallel to it. Hemp lashing held the entire structure together and secured it at one end to two soaring rubber trees. At the other end stood a house on stilts.

Yang stood beside the two trees. He stretched out a hand and ran his fingers over the heavy hemp lashing ropes, feeling how sturdy they were. He looked everything over with great care while he flapped a moldering newspaper to drive away tiny black midges. Beads of sweat had crawled over the exposed parts of his upper body and soaked his shirt, and the large bag he carried on his shoulders had left him breathing hard. Moments later, he pulled out two newspapers, spread them on top of dead leaves, and sat heavily. He unfolded another section, marked “South Malaysia News” at the top. A news item outlined in red in the lower left corner, just to the left of an ad for imported condoms, caught his eye. The headline was “Young Man’s Strange Disappearance in Payoh, Whereabouts Unknown.” The article read: “(Reported on 19th of xx) An unidentified stranger recently built a stilt house three miles outside the city’s center and lived there for just over three months

before he suddenly disappeared two weeks ago, according to local rubber tappers. A police investigation concluded that his departure was voluntary. Some suspect the man was a drug addict, although there seems to be no evidence of this. Locals discovered several sheets of manuscript paper in the house. He may have been a minor writer of no particular importance....”

Yang had first seen a copy of this news item just after his return from visiting Fang Hsiu in “Lion City.” At that point, his head was full of literary history, but few of the clues he had hoped to find while in Singapore. Like a sudden electric shock, the report had suffused his entire body with inspiration and an energy that swept away months of exhaustion. He had promptly filed the report away, in a three-foot wide cabinet that overflowed with similar material. After more than an hour in a bus, he had traveled by foot up the narrow mountain trail, asking people for directions along the way, feeling his way toward his destination.

“This bridge...”

He’d never seen anything like the bridge, and it made a deep impression on him; half-suspended over the swamp, it seemed permeated by illusion. The sounds of cars and people had disappeared the instant he left the city, replaced by the calls of birds and animals at rest in the underbrush, and the noise of monkeys passing through the forest trees. He looked around him with the avid gaze of an explorer, using the

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handrail to steady himself as he stepped onto the bridge's narrow walkway.

Eyes fixed on his feet, he moved forward step by step, rocking and swaying. A miscellany of rank grasses grew in clumps below the bridge, the clear, bottomless swamp visible in between; in the water, small fish swam vigorously, and dragonflies laid eggs. The swamp grasses led him forward, toward his destination. After a lengthy interval, the scenery below him changed, and he saw the reflection of the attap wood house. He hopped onto its floor, making it sway, and then wiped away his sweat. He turned to look back at the bridge. He thought it now looked even more like a dinosaur skeleton, the color of a fossil.

He knew the house was empty, but even so he moved with some haste to knock on the door. The door wasn't latched, so that a single knock caused it to swing open with a creak. The failing afternoon light had left the interior of the house nearly dark, but he could see a box of matches and an oil lamp on the floor. He wasted no time removing the lamp's glass shade and lit it; the room filled with instant light. He put down his bag, stripped off shoes, socks, and shirt, then groped hastily for the insect-repellent incense. He lit this too, and the swarm of midges finally began to disperse. He opened both windows, rolled a newspaper into a stick to clean the cobwebs from the room's corners, and swept the floor until he felt somewhat more secure. Books were scattered haphazardly across the floor, some still spread open. He glanced at the covers, astonished to see they included Li Yongping's *Retribution: The Jiling Chronicles* and *A La-tzu Woman*, Chang Kueihsin's *Sons and Daughters of Keshan*, Pan Yutong's *The Stars Last Night*, and Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*. In addition to these, there was a small number of novels in English, Japanese, and Malay (including the romanticized history known as *The Malay Annals*). Stacked in the corner with some toilet paper were Fang Peifang's *Tree with Deep Roots*,

Fang Hsiu's *Draft for a New Literary History of Malaysian Chinese Literature*, Ma Lun's *Group Portrait of Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese Authors*, and a well-worn copy of the *Tao Te Ching*. On a low table, along with ink, fountain pen, and typewriter, a chunk of wood held down several pages of dusty notes.

Scrawled in an uneven hand across the first of these pages were these lines:

*As though beneath your female dignity  
You pay my melancholy's every left forgotten bloom  
no heed*

Deeply puzzled, he flipped through the whole stack. Other pages contained strange mathematical formulas, such as  $M = M1 + M2 + M3 + \dots + Mn$ , and mystifying numbers like 22/505, NEW, 23 22+1, and so on. He took out his notebook and recorded these one by one. The very last page was a shopping list. On it was written (his notes inside the parentheses): 25 May, tea, 1 package (Famous Chinese tea); insect-repellent incense, 1 box (Goldfish brand); soap, 5 bars (Lux); talcum powder (Pureen); toothpaste (Darlie); sausage, 300 g.; eggs, 10; rice, 5 kg; oil, 1 bottle; salt, 1 bag; laundry detergent (Quick White); shampoo (Follow Me); facial cleanser; kerosene.

In a crack in the floor, he found a withdrawal slip from Bank Negara Malaysia for M\$500 and a package delivery receipt. The house had no separate rooms. In one corner, simple cooking utensils were set out.

Making do with what he had, he washed out a pot, hastily rinsed some rice, and started a fire with the dry kindling that was left. There were still a couple of sausages, and an egg.... Through the open window he saw a bamboo pole extending into a clump of trees in the water. He supposed that was where the toilet was. To bathe, he could climb down the steps and rinse off in the water. He felt as if he were seeing stilt houses

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from an entirely new perspective.

Night fell. He tidied everything and then set about creating a summary of possibilities, suggested by his investigations over the past several months. First thing tomorrow morning, he would make a final round of inquiries in the area. If that didn't produce results, he would be forced to admit defeat and give up. Among the dense black of the trees, he could just make out a faint yellow light. He thought it might belong to the household that had reported the disappearance to the authorities, and it made him wonder, what would they think, seeing a light here again? Everything seemed predestined. At a fork in the road, he had relied on intuition and chosen the path that led here, had found this place that matched the report in the local news section of that paper. He opened his sweat-speckled notebook, closed his eyes, and marshalled his thoughts.

The whole business had begun with an interview.

On July 8, on the second floor of the Kuala Lumpur Hilton Hotel, an urgent meeting of the "National Literature Symposium" was convened, every last one of the some three hundred participants a Malaysian writer. The lights were bright but soft, tasteful and poetic, and everyone who wore batik looked exceptionally solemn. As chairperson, author A could speak first, though everyone there had already heard his news as rumor: an esteemed colleague, writing under the pseudonym "M," had written a novel (*Kristmas*). This novel had attracted critical regard in the US, including the attention of *The New York Times*. In fact, it had won such significant acclaim that a university professor was thinking of recommending it for the Nobel Prize in Literature, and this had prompted *The New York Times* to send someone to investigate the writer's identity. The result of this investigation, however, was the discovery that M "might be anyone." The manuscript had been sent from

West Malaysia, and the author's remuneration had been donated to the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies. This information provided the first clue: M was Malaysian.

Accordingly, *The New York Times* had immediately contacted the Malaysian Writers' Society and the Association of Chinese Writers and told them that Americans wanted to know who M was; if they could also have the author's detailed biographical information and all of his published works, all the better. Malaysians had finally received the good news awaited since the founding of their national literary history: a "great author" had appeared. At this point, Mohammed (the chairperson) boiled down their problem to two points:

- (1) Who was this writer? And what was his ethnicity?
- (2) Could a work published in English be considered "national literature"?

Placed at each table where participants sat was a copy of a thick, brick-like book with a bronze *Kris* sword on its front and a blood-red dragon on the back.

At first, everyone assumed the author might be sitting there among them. Every head turned to look at everyone else present, and at a few people in particular who were known for writing novels (like Anwar Ridhwan), or who had received multiple national literary awards. All the poets felt some mild heartburn at there being "zero probability" it could be any of them; still, they hoped someone would step forward and confess since it would be good to have this question cleared up (and a statement made denying the person was ethnically Chinese). Yet they also hoped M wasn't on the scene, thus leaving everyone on essentially "equal" footing. The whole venue was silent for a long while, with everyone looking at everybody else and giving each other knowing, awkward smiles. No one was able to suppress a sigh, or to keep from uttering the doubt, "Could M actually be Chinese?"

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After that, the discussion became a bit one-sided, as most of those who favored the patriotic cultural perspective held that national literature had to be written in Malay. This was to say that even if someone were to obtain favor in international literary circles with an “English edition,” it couldn’t be considered national literature because only a text written in Malay met the criteria.

“It’s the principle of the thing!” K shouted. He was a novelist, too.

Usman Awang saw the situation was getting out of hand and promptly took the floor to steer the discussion onto “how to promote Malaysian literature’s stature in international circles,” and other similar questions. As a reporter, Yang absorbed random snatches of the ensuing rhetoric. Then, having spotted the bent head of the furiously writing reporter from the *Nanyang Business Daily*, he made “let’s go” gestures at him and his other colleagues. At the door he flagged down a taxi, and hurried over to the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall.

The old and much renovated Assembly Hall was brightly lit, and already crowded with people. In the entry, a red cloth with white lettering proclaimed “Malaysian Chinese Writers Association, Malaysian Chinese Literature Symposium.” He squeezed to the front and took a group photo of Yuan Shang-Tsao, Yu Chuan, Hung Chuan, Fang Hsiu, Fang Peifang, et al. A single sweeping glance told him that almost all the important writers had arrived together, including the East Malaysian “Rajang Riverbank poet” Wu An.

Wen Jenping, pushing up his thick, black-framed glasses, asked in a thin voice: “Why didn’t any of us know about this colleague?”

Everyone wore shirts and slacks, except for Wen Jenping in batik, Woon Swee Oan in a western suit, and Fu Chengde in a traditional *cheongsam*. Woon Swee Oan, a martial arts novelist, spoke up cautiously to say that, on the

basis of the information at his disposal (including rumors), M was very likely one of the people present – but then again, maybe not.

“Based on the text,” he said, taking a copy of *Kristmas* from his briefcase, “we can probably make a rough guess at the writer’s background. Only three conclusions are possible.” These he proceeded to analyze one by one. “First, he was a child from a poor family who had no formal education, an autodidact who has relied entirely on his own hard work to succeed. He has kept at it, writing nonstop for many years. Writers who meet these criteria are Ting Yun and Yu Chuan.” These words moved both Ting and Yu considerably, and before long their eyes were red-rimmed. “However, in light of what Mr. Ting and Mr. Yu have published so far, neither of these gentlemen has achieved such a high level.” Both men flushed a deep crimson. “Second, he’s probably a graduate of Nanyang University, currently 40 to 50 years old, who leaned left in his younger years. His writing crosses multiple literary genres. Representative writers would be Fang Peifang and Meng Sha.” Both Fang and Meng looked pleased. “However, these writers put undue emphasis on realism, with excessive reporting and insufficient art.” The sound of gnashing teeth came from somewhere in the crowd. “Third, he studied abroad in Taiwan. While there, he experienced the fully ripened fruits of Taiwanese vernacular literature, and took nourishment from European and American literature. It’s even more likely this person comes specifically from a department of foreign languages. Representative writers are Li Yongping, Chang Kueihsin, myself, Pan Yutong, Shang Wanyun....” At this point Wen Jenping eased slightly away from the microphone toward his seat, his face the green of oxidized copper. Woon Swee Oan went on, glowing with enjoyment:

“As for me, my English isn’t very good, so we can certainly put me aside for now. Pan Yutong is possibly...”

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A-GA

# 花甲男孩

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## YANG FU-MIN 楊富閔

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- Category: Literary Fiction, Short Stories
  - Publisher: Chiu Ko
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  - Length: 95,000 characters (approx. 66,500 words in English)
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Yang Fu-Min is currently a doctoral candidate at National Taiwan University, where he researches post-World War II Taiwanese literature. He has been named an outstanding young writer by Books.com.tw, the island's largest online bookselling platform, as well as by The Almanac of Taiwan Literature.



\* Shortlisted for Taipei Book Fair Award 2011

\* Shortlisted for Golden Tripod Award 2011

\* Adapted into hit TV drama *A Boy Named Floral A* in 2017

Yang Fu-Min's breakthrough collection of short stories, rich in narrative color, tells tales of those who seek and do not always find. A "prodigal" son who leaves his rural home to study and build a career holds the dream of returning in his heart; a father who lost his son to a car accident becomes a bus driver in order to transport children his son's age safely to and from school, yet in the end remains alone; an elderly woman, whose dying husband had many long-term affairs, rides her pink bicycle into town in order to pray for his soul.

Yang mixes Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, and internet slang in a highly experimental narrative that shines like a kaleidoscope of image and experience. The term "stream-of-consciousness" doesn't quite describe the unique integration of absurdity, whimsy, and empathetic description that defines the work.

These nine short stories of contemporary Taiwan earned the praise of renowned author Pai Hsien-Yung, who states in the book's preface that Yang Fu-Min is filling the shoes of Huang Chun-Ming and Wang Chen-He as the new voice of local fiction in Taiwan.

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# A-GA

By Yang Fu-Ming

Translated by A.C. Baecker

## Bibi

“Bibi says she’s going to show me the world!” Bookworm Grandpa spoke in a child’s voice, drumming on his wheelchair.

“Go to hell! I deal with your shit all day long, just lay off me!” Aqua Grannie jumped on the bed and tried to hit him, but Sophia stopped her, pleading: “Boss-lady, Bibi has tormented Boss-man too, you know...” Indignant, Aqua Grannie said to Bookworm Grandpa, “You want crazy? You’re always telling me that I come from a family of wack jobs, well I’ll give you crazy!”

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During the afternoon of the twenty-ninth day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar, Aqua Grannie heard Sophia say, “Boss-Man isn’t eating.” Immediately, she threw down the student uniforms she had been sewing and picked up her road bike with the bright pink frame. She threw on her white, sweat-wicking cycling top, black cycling capris, and strapped on her thirty-holed helmet, which glowed a luminescent alien neon yellow. Her full suit of armor successfully transformed her into a pheasant-tailed jacana. Her girlish figure now fully on display, she hit the road.

Presently, she arrived at the Hui-An Temple, and went inside to speak to the Goddess Mazu. Decked out in her finest, she took her place inside the solemn shrine. Muttering, she held

three sticks of incense in her hands, passing them on to Sophia as she pushed her semi-rimless glasses with transition lenses up to the top of her head. They perfectly accessorized her seventy-five-year-old, weather-beaten face, which was tiny and blessed with the best complexion of all the grannies and grandpas. All she ever cared about, though, was making sure her sunglasses didn’t obstruct the bodhisattva mole on her forehead. She turned to her grandson, who stood in front of her with a digital video camera, and said, “This is grannie’s GPS. A satellite navigation system.” Aqua Grannie liked keeping up with all the latest lingo.

She had forgotten that Sophia wasn’t familiar with Taiwan’s incense customs, and was surprised to see that she had placed the three sticks upside down in the brass pot. She teased Sophia, telling her, “Putting three sticks of incense upside down means that I’m sending an invitation of war to Mazu. That sounds about right!” Grandson chirped back, “Yes, take your chances with Mazu!” The camera stopped on Sophia, and she clapped her hands, saying “Boss-Lady, have a safe trip!”

The three of them exited the temple and entered a square with yellow prayer ribbons tied everywhere. Aqua Grannie looked around her, and felt as though hundreds and thousands of charms had fallen from the sky. Loud clapping noises erupted like the thunderstorms of southwest Taiwan. Aqua Grannie hopped nimbly upon her trusty little pink bike without telling

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anyone where she was going. Shouting as if the Goddess Mazu was hard of hearing, Sophia and Grandson yelled: “We wish Taiwan’s most badass grannie good luck on her bike trip. Bon voyage!”

Good luck and bon voyage.

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Welcome to “Our People.”

Aqua Grannie found herself absent-mindedly cycling through the Fujianese-style gates of “Our People” on her little pink bike. First, she squatted outside the homes of “Our People” and threw up into the gutter. Once she had finished, she announced that she was looking for someone. Unable to tell the difference between a nursing home, a hospice, and a rehabilitation center, she walked her bike through the entryway of every building. She carried herself the same way she did when she came to Tainan many years ago to look at property on behalf of her son, surprised to find so much of the space inside the gates done up nicely. The nurse came out to tell her that she had to register as a visitor, and that they didn’t have anywhere for cyclists to rest or inflate their tires.

Aqua Grannie spoke politely, telling them, “I’m looking for my youngest brother-in-law, but I don’t know his name. My husband is about to pass on, and I’ve come to tell his younger brother. This is our custom in the countryside.” Wearing uniforms from the Tzu Chi Foundation, the nurse clasped her hands and bowed to Aqua Grannie, invoking the Buddha’s name. She pointed at a hedge covered in orchids that ran along the mountainside: Pass through the Mountain Plum conservancy, cross Zengwen River, and make your way through the model salt fields of Chiku village. You’ll find the Sinon pesticide store, you’ll know it from their displays of Yuching mangoes without a single blemish. The only inhabited place is the physical therapy center. There’s a shrine to the Earth God that

dispenses nostalgia like an ATM dispenses cash. It’s built into a still and winding corridor, so long you can’t see to the end. “The person you’re looking for is there, in the audiovisual center.” The lady from the hospice stood on her tiptoes and made inscrutable gestures into the air.

Aqua Grannie was astonished by the strange world she’d come to. Somehow it felt familiar – was she entering purgatory? In the distance, she caught the sound of a dharma teacher worshipping at an altar, and she followed the noise. This time, she’d truly entered the “City of Innocent Deaths” – the six hundred and fifty square meters of the audiovisual center. “Uncle! It’s me, Aqua. I’ve come to see you.” Her voice echoed through the thick air.

Immediately, a thousand heads turned to looked at her, their expressions calcified like so many funerary statues. Following the sounds of the dharma teacher at worship, she’d discovered a room full of youngest uncles. Aqua Grannie saw a crowd arrayed vapidly around the TV, stirring occasionally only to brush off blowflies that had settled on their knees. “I can’t believe there are so many people here!” she said. Two hundred wheelchairs stood in her way. The humid air brought perspiration to her nose, and she made her way through, apologizing constantly as she searched for her uncle. She gasped and cried out.

“Uncle A-Chao, I thought you’d moved! But you’ve been living here!” Aqua Grannie held up Uncle A-Chao’s listless head with both hands. Then she turned. “What, you’re here too, Teacher Li? I thought you moved in with your son after you retired. But you’re here too!” One by one, Aqua Grandma started recognizing everyone around her. “Su Mama, Big Brother Li, Auntie Clam, you’re all here!”

“My God!” Aqua Grannie stumbled onto the floor, and sat. “Great-aunt, Great-aunt, I thought you’d died! I hadn’t heard from you in so long, and you’re still alive.” Speechless, Aqua Grannie looked from person to person. Everyone in the

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audiovisual center was silent except for long, raspy breaths that rattled out from deep within like mist coming off a river. Aqua Grannie splashed her way across.

Mustering all her strength, Aqua Grannie heaved a sigh and stood up, as if she were pulling herself out of the wetlands of Chiku. She had chronic anemia, and felt dizzy as soon as she stood. She grabbed the nearest wheelchair for support and saw who it contained. "Youngest Uncle, it's you!" She howled. "It's me, Aqua, Aqua. Your sister-in-law." Youngest Uncle's head jutted out, and Aqua Grannie knelt on one knee, her right hand grasping his wheelchair. "Youngest Uncle, it's Aqua. I've come to tell you that your brother is not long for this world...."

*Bibi-beep.*

The hospice staff came out told Aqua Grannie that her little pink bike was blocking a red zone and was about to be towed, *bibi-beep*. She needed to say goodbye and leave immediately. Aqua Grannie said to herself, "Don't say goodbye whatever you do, don't, you can't say goodbye when you've come to announce a death." She stumbled out of "Our People," feeling like she were leaving Uncle forever. Would they ever have the chance to see each other again? The towing crew blared their horn at her and she was engulfed by the noise, a faint echo in her ear.

As soon as Aqua Grannie left she felt overcome with dizziness, and immediately pulled onto the side of the road. She bought a bottle of water from a betel nut stand and gulped it down. Honks of *bibi-beep* drew her back onto the road with her bike, and once again she followed the sound, sobbing as she clawed her way back into the world of the living.

"He'll be gone soon." Aqua Grannie suddenly felt very calm. She knew the way back home, following the main road back to town. Bike manners were human manners, and she'd put off a follow-up visit to the hospital and two trips to physical therapy for her kneecap to go on this

trip. She'd been consumed with thoughts of the funeral, mentally preparing herself for it. Cycling along at a steady clip, she suddenly realized she was in no rush. She felt overcome by the shock of leaving "Our People."

"He'll wait." She was sure of it, and her bike was steady.

Aqua Grannie had always felt guilty about her children. When her marriage started having problems, she swore that she wouldn't let them grow up without a father. But she also couldn't tell a lie, and so when she ran into friends or acquaintances, she would say bluntly, "He's off traveling around the island. He loves Taiwan. He loves it more than he loves me." Fortunately, she had raised good children. They had their own families and led comfortable lives. They each wanted their mother to move into their home, and argued amongst themselves over it, telling her "I can't forgive that man." But Aqua Grannie refused their offers and stayed at home to look after "that man."

When Sophia arrived, she put the extra time to good use. She started learning about organic vegetables, led a choir in the village, and volunteered to serve as a crossing guard after school. She wanted to take a Japanese class, as she'd forgotten much of what she'd learned before. If I ever have the chance, she thought, I've got to do a tour of the island. She also wanted to see it, and to see everything that Bookworm Grandpa had seen. Bookworm Grandpa had traveled around Taiwan once. He'd conquered mountaintop after mountaintop, escaped disaster by the skin of his teeth, been with every kind of woman, and written a few poems. But when he returned to Kuantien in his later years, it was Aqua Grannie, the plains aborigine, who kept him company, holding hands with the lunatic. Still, all Bookworm Grandpa could say was, "Bibi's going show me the world, shining shimmering splendid."

*Bibi*, that's right. Aqua Grannie felt pressed

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forward by the world around her.

The little pink bike pulled into a police station on the side of the road, where she took a look at her tires. The blue skies above Tainan were as beautiful as those above Kenting, and the cops were astonished by how fit she was. Without reserve, Aqua Grannie replied back, “I came to tell someone about a death in the family even though the head of household hasn’t died yet. Does that make me crazy?” The little pink bike continued on, merging onto the expressway. From behind her garnet-colored lenses, the pitch-black of the freshly paved road, the blue skies above, and her little pink bike looked like a world caught on fire, like a new life.

Before returning home, she entered a stretch of road lined with miles upon miles of mango trees, their fruit falling to the ground. Aqua Grannie stopped and peeled a mango with her bare hands. As she ate it, her strength returned. She heard the familiar sound of water flowing through a drainage ditch, and saw joyful yellow ribbons, yellow ribbons, yellow ribbons! The water chestnuts she knew so well, vim and vigor, a lifetime of troubles erased, her mind cleared.

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Day 30 of the sixth lunar month. Grandson used to go to bed when the sun came up. This time, he and Sophia stayed up cleaning the living room. They took out the leather sofa, wine cabinet, and physical therapy equipment (were they preparing for the funeral?). Bookworm Grandpa was in a great mood and shouted for Bibi. His script hadn’t changed for three years: Bibi is going to show me the world, shining shimmering splendid. Grandson pushed his wheelchair, and by eight or nine the light was strong enough for Sophia to take out an umbrella for shade. It looked like a scene where a casket was being moved. Bookworm Grandpa didn’t look like someone who was about to die. He kept saying

*Bi-bi-bi*, and neighbors he hadn’t seen for years remarked, “Oh, you’ve come out to get some sun!”, or “How lovely of your grandson to take you out on a walk.” Every now and then Sophia massaged the acupressure points on his neck and shoulders, and measured his temperature with the palm of her hand. “All good.” Grandson tossed his flip-flops to the side of the road and walked barefoot with Sophia following along. In fluent Mandarin, she said, “Grandpa, we can travel the world without stepping foot off the ground!” Bookworm Grandpa said, “Bibi.”

Back at the public school where Bookworm Grandpa had been a student, they saw the ruins of a Japanese shrine. Grandson clapped twice and said they’d arrived in Japan, they were in Japan. They slapped together an itinerary quickly, stopping first in Japan and then to Southeast Asia. Passing through an industrial road, they found a food stall made from sheets of aluminum with graffiti on top: oppression. Sophia said, “Grandpa, we’re in Vietnam! We’re in a food stall in Vietnam!” True to form, Bookworm Grandpa said “Bibi,” and his eyes followed his grandson’s pointed finger. *Bibi*.

Panting as they pushed the wheelchair through the arcade, they began looking for a place to shelter from the sun. Luckily, they walked past a family watching a Yankees game. Grandson squatted in front of the wheelchair and said, “Grandpa, we’re in New York! Look! Chien-Ming from Tainan is pitching!” Bookworm Grandpa’s *bibi* calls became fainter, and Sophia jumped up – they had to go right now! Grandpa’s *bibi* perked up again. Grandson took his black-framed glasses off to wipe away tears. “Grandpa, we’re going to stop traveling now. Stop saying *bi-bi*, and stop pushing me around. Grandma’s on her way back.”

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# MY NAME IS HSU LIANG-LIANG

## 我是許涼涼

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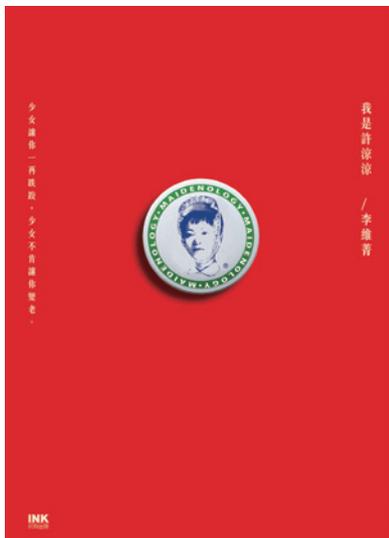


LEE WEI-JING  
李維菁

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- Category: Literary Fiction, Short Stories
  - Publisher: Ink
  - Date: 10/2010
  - Rights contact: booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
  - Pages: 320
  - Length: 110,000 characters (approx. 77,000 words in English)
- 

Lee Wei-Jing is an author and cultural critic, known for her collection of stories and poems *The Importance of Old-School Dating*, her novel *Barging Into Heaven*, and this collection of short stories.



\* 2011 Taipei Book Fair Award

As with every big city, Taipei is a jungle of love and dating, and those who aren't careful can lose themselves permanently. Hsu Liang-Liang may be one such soul: thirty-eight, well-educated, and financially independent, she presents a polished facade to the outside world. Yet her love life is an absolute shambles, like so many of her tribe. When she falls in love with a man twelve years her junior, her friends predict that it can't possibly end well. Yet he seems so nice, and so in love with her at first that she can't help but dive in.

As his attentions waver and things get worse, the chorus of voices around her and in her head get louder. He won't introduce her to his family; there is a younger woman who stays in the picture. This chapter in her history as an ex-girlfriend is told with vigor, bravery, and painful attention to ironic detail, deconstructing love and sex with a cold, modern eye.

*My Name is Hsu Liang-Liang* is a Taipei-style *Sex and the City* with the spice and elegance of Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* thrown in. Urban women step one by one up to the author's microphone and tell their tales of motel rooms, shopping malls, text messages, and dreams in the vocabulary of contemporary attraction.

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# MY NAME IS HSU-LIANG LIANG

By Lee Wei-Jing

Translated by Scott Rainen and Jack Hargreaves

Edited by Duncan McHenry

Additional Assistance by Liu Le and Li Xiaofan

1

Call me Hsu Liang-Liang. I'm 38 years old, and I've just been dumped, but I can't tell if I've come to terms with that yet.

My boyfriend, Sun Ta-Wei, was 12 years younger. He dumped me because I was too old. "Our age difference doesn't seem all too great now," he'd say, "but give it a few years and it'll be more and more obvious. I can't handle it. I want to be able to face my friends and family with my wife...I've tried to introduce you to my friends... To my parents...But I just can't bring myself to do it. I get that, given our current appearances, the difference is the least obvious that it's going to be, but I still can't do it. A few years later, and I'll be even more certain about this feeling. I don't want that kind of life. I tried, and I just can't do it."

If you're still reading, you probably think I'm ugly, but that's actually not true. I look ten years younger than I am. I'm slender; my eyes are big, and my face is an oval. I have nice legs. I look better now than I've ever looked before. When I was young, I was a little fat and had acne. Constant overwork in my twenties made me so thin that I didn't look human. Nobody called me pretty back then, but today people compliment my looks relatively often.

Ever since I was a child, I've wanted to marry, have a stable family and a relationship. When he showed up, I thanked the heavens. There was an age gap, but our love was mutual, and I felt the heavens were looking out for me. I wanted

to spend my life with him and have my happily ever after.

I first fell for him a year and a half ago. I was deeply drawn to him, but my rationality told me it wasn't a good idea, that our age difference was too great for it to lead anywhere. I wanted to have a life of marriage and children and my own family.

"I'm not trying to fool around with my life and I don't want some kind of friends-with-benefits thing," I told him. "So please don't mess with me. We don't have a future."

But he replied, "How can we not have a future? I love you. You're my one. We'll get married before you're 40. Even if my mother doesn't accept you at first, she'll figure out that you're a good person, and get over her hesitations."

"It's not about age," he told me. "It's about two souls becoming one."

I took his hand and felt the heavens shine down on me.

I truly loved him. We viewed marriage as the goal of our relationship, and he called my cat his "son." When he went abroad, he'd come back with toys for our "son." Sometimes we strolled around markets together and fantasized about the design of the home we'd someday have or what our children would look like when they were grown. Since I couldn't be around for Ta-Wei's childhood, I hoped to have a son just like him: the same pale skin, single eyelids, and bushy eyebrows. I'd cradle him in my arms, and

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hold his little hand as I walked him to school.

“I hope our child looks like you,” he told me. “With your same big eyes and oval face.”

“Eventually, we’ll have a house of our own,” he said. “Hopefully with a pond in the courtyard.” Ta-Wei liked fishing, swimming, and diving. He kept a fish tank at his place. Every Saturday we went to Keelung, and I watched him dive into the water to catch fish for his tank. Then he happily returned home with his “fresh blood.”

I asked him if in the future he’d take our children swimming, and he grasped my hands, saying, “Of course. Of course I will.” Then he kissed me with his soft lips. I loved it when he kissed me.

Ta-Wei always called me babe. He always called me that.

He worked in Taichung and I in Taipei. Every morning I called him at exactly seven to wake him up. In the evening when I got off, I always called to wish him goodnight. I avoided smoking and drinking so that my body would be able to bear our dear little children inside me. I diligently applied facial masks so we’d look a good match, and managed my finances in order to pay for our children’s education, along with other life expenses. Perhaps after the wedding I’d want hyaluronic acid or Botox treatments so that our age difference wouldn’t look that considerable.

As I flip through the diary that spans the past year and a half, I find it overflowing with happiness. A friend who hadn’t seen me for a long time commented, “You look completely different,” while another congratulated me on finding a home.

Still, Ta-Wei and I had moments of inexplicable tension that led to arguments.

Things came between us. After a year and a half of dating, he still wouldn’t let me meet his family. He bluntly told his mother that he had broken up with his girlfriend in order to avoid her questions. In the past, he had immediately

introduced his girlfriends to his family. I cried in the car. I asked him why. He said he’d find the right time.

Once, we fought because he stayed close with an old middle school classmate. He admitted to me that they had had feelings for each other before but hadn’t gotten together because he had a girlfriend at the time. When he broke up with his ex, the two thought they might be together, but then I came along. They always stayed in touch. “But,” he told me, “I’ve already made changes for you. She and I have always gotten coffee together, but I’ve reduced how often I meet up with her one-on-one, for your sake.”

We ran into one of his colleagues in Kaohsiung once, and for a moment his grip on my hand stiffened, but then he waved and said hello.

“Did you hesitate because you weren’t sure if you wanted to introduce me or not?”

“Yes,” he said. “But I’ve gotten over it already. Didn’t I say hello?”

Half a year passed, and I hadn’t met his parents. Half a year more, and I was still waiting. We fought over this.

“I can’t stand you anymore,” he told me. “I just want to break up. I know I said I wanted to marry you, but not so fast.”

I was weeping. “But didn’t you promise?”

“I’m not saying we definitely have no future, just that we need to push marriage back a little. You can’t just think about your own age. Think about how young I am for a moment. Why would I settle down so early? If you can’t accept this, then it would be best for us to break up.”

We kept arguing until I fell apart. “Don’t leave me,” I pleaded. “We can marry a little later. I can wait. I don’t want to fight with you. I promise I won’t fight with you again.”

Ta-Wei’s birthday was last week. He decided to have a party at his family home and invite his friends, former classmates, and me.

I was very happy. I’d never been to his house

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before, and what was even more important is that he was lowering the guard that I had fought against for so long. He was always at my place playing with my cat, and once, when he went to sleep on the bed gifted to me by my dead grandmother, he told me to get some rest so that I'd look pretty – “you might run into my mother.” I rushed to buy a box of expensive face masks and applied them every day.

Three days before his birthday, he told me that he'd asked his mother to leave during the party since he was worried that parents would stifle the atmosphere.

I blankly stared at him, but I told myself that I loved him and that I could wait.

I went to the department store three days in a row before his birthday and tried to find an appropriate gift. I assumed that he'd like a new wallet. Since he always put it in his pocket and needed one made of soft leather that would fit more smoothly.

The day before his birthday, he told me that I might still meet his mom. “If she leaves late, you might bump into her.”

I was so nervous.

I took the metro to meet up with Ta-Wei on the big day. I opened his car door, and the girl from his middle school was seated next to him wearing a tight, black tank top with thin shoulder straps that hugged her boobs. She'd made her face up very white, and carefully applied eyeliner and mascara to make her eyes pop.

When we got to his house, his mother had already left. He jumped into the noise and fervor of his friends without me.

I stood in the courtyard where they were barbecuing. No one spoke to me. Then I went to his living room to lay down and nap.

Ta-Wei's mother came home as the party was tailing off. He rushed to hand me my phone, and said he'd take me home.

“But my handbag's still in the living room....”

“I'll get it for you.”

He whisked me out the door hurriedly, but as we were heading out I had a chance to say goodbye to his mom.

I thought we'd spend the evening together at my place, but he just wanted to leave. My eyes welled up with tears. “Wait a minute,” I said, and handed him the leather wallet that I'd spent so much time picking out. He took it from me, then left.

We argued on the phone that night. He told me that his friends didn't like me because my face looked sour for the whole party and that he just wanted me to go away. I told him that none of his friends had spoken to me. They were all having fun with each other, and I didn't know anybody, so why should I get involved?

“Who do you think you are?” Ta-Wei asked me. “Why should they be making the effort to speak to you? That's your responsibility.” He told me they all thought I was quiet at first and didn't like talking, but later just thought I just couldn't be bothered to pay any attention to them.

“Why didn't you introduce me to your mom?” I asked. “I was right in front of her.”

“I was too embarrassed to say anything.”

“Why are you like this?” I started to cry. “I was embarrassed when we ran into my parents and brother unexpectedly, but I still introduced you to them. It's basic manners!”

“Just be honest for a minute. At your age it doesn't matter if you're with a younger boy. Why would your parents have reason to be concerned? It's obviously mine that would be hurt.”

“How are you always so cruel?” I yelled at him. “Are my parents not actually parents? Or is a girl my age incapable of getting hurt? Don't you have an older sister yourself?”

“What the fuck do you want me to do about it? Let's just break up!”

I called him again several days later.

“It's over,” he said. “I tried, but I just can't. When you turn 50 I'll have just turned 38. How could I leave the house with you as my wife?”

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What would my friends think?"

I swallowed. "You don't want me to go out with you? That's all? I won't push you to introduce me to your parents or friends anymore."

"I don't want a woman I can't go outside with."

"Should I be ashamed of my age?"

"We don't have a future," he said. "We just don't fit."

"Don't say that!" I said. "I'm begging you not to say that. Don't say that to me now that I love you."

He asked me why I was being so irrational. "You only think of your future – never mine!"

I became hysterical. I was shouting and crying. "Don't leave me!" I begged. "Don't leave me – don't be so cruel! I won't force you to marry me. When I'm ugly, I'll just leave. Give me a few more years...I'm begging you...Baby...I'm begging you. It doesn't matter if you don't want to marry me or take me out in public. I just want to be with the person I love. Give me a few more years. Just one. Just a little more time to be with you. I won't do it again. I won't argue with you anymore. I'm begging you...."

"I don't want this either," he responded. "We don't have a future together. I can't get over our age difference."

"It doesn't matter. I'll just hide."

"I've told you that I don't want a wife like that."

"I don't want you to marry me. It doesn't matter if you don't. Just give me a little more time. Or have I already gotten ugly? Am I already too old, and you can't stand me anymore?"

"Just let me go," he said. "You're scaring me."

My friend knew I was heartbroken. She hadn't seen me for less than a week, and I'd already gotten skinnier. I couldn't eat or sleep. She asked what had happened, and I told her that I was too old for him to bear.

"Did his mom have a problem with you

being too old?" she asked.

"No," I responded. "He didn't even introduce me to his mom because he couldn't get over my age. He wouldn't introduce me to his friends either. What was true yesterday is not true today, and what was untrue yesterday is true today; we cast a blind eye to whatever violates our notions of loyalty or morality when it comes to love...." I tried not to cry as I said this to her.

"Bullshit!" my friend said over the phone. "If you were Lin Chi-Ling and 20 years older than him, he would still happily drag you around to meet his parents and friends. Or even if you were Nita Ing and 30 years his senior, he'd still marry you with a smile and take you back home to live harmoniously, and he'd keep on loving you up to your last breath. It's just that it's you. Your looks are fine, but you're no famous model; you have a decent job, but you're no CEO, and you're not wealthy." She paused. "Honestly, how could you be so naïve? Almost 40 and you really think there's somebody out there who wants to marry you at that age? How can you be so old and still think to fall in love, marry, and have kids? Just let it go. Come out and kill your time drinking instead."

I hung up the phone, and stood up on shaking legs. Then I fell to the ground and began dry heaving.

It had nothing to do with two souls.

My name is Hsu Liang-Liang, and I'm 38 years old. I still believe in love and marriage, and this makes me feel a profound shame.

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# WHERE ARE YOU GOING, LITTLE MONKEY?

## 小猴子，你要去哪裡？

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TSUI YUNG-YEN  
崔永嬾

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- Category: Picture book
  - Publisher:  
CommonWealth Education
  - Date: 10/2016
  - Rights contact:  
booksfromtaiwan.rights  
@gmail.com
  - Pages: 32
  - Size: 23.1 x 23.1 cm
- 

The multi-talented Tsui Yung-Yen is both a published illustrator and a celebrated sculptor. Since graduating with her MFA from the National Taipei University of the Arts, she has authored several children's books, and her work with both two-dimensional and three-dimensional media have been featured in exhibits all over the world.



Little Monkey is playing beneath an apple tree when he finds something small and brightly colored on the ground. He picks it up gently and starts walking. Where is he going? Grandpa Bear, Uncle Giraffe, and several other animal friends who meet Little Monkey on the road all want to know, but Little Monkey says nothing. Curious, they follow him in an ever-growing train, all the way across the river to Dr. Lion's clinic. There, they finally discover what Little Monkey is carrying...

Tsui Yung-Yen enlivens a very simple story with the power of suspense and endearing illustrations. Rich in visual texture, her art revels in color and roundness in a way that delights the eye.



TIME SAVES NINE

14

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

CALENDAR

2019

1 January

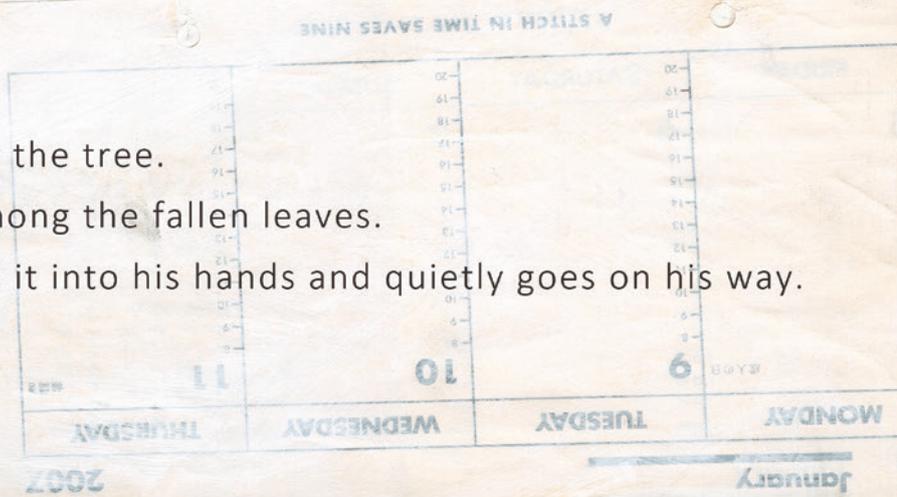
SUN	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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2 February

SUN	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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Little Monkey is playing under the tree.  
He finds something blue in among the fallen leaves.  
Carefully, carefully, he scoops it into his hands and quietly goes on his way.



“Morning, Little Monkey! Where are you going?”  
Grandpa Bear asks.







But Little Monkey doesn't answer, he doesn't even look up.  
He just quietly goes on his way.



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# ONE HUNDRED PIGS AND ONE HUNDRED WOLVES

## 100 隻豬與 100 隻大野狼

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A holder of Master's degrees in Children's Literature and Information Engineering, Tsai Shing-Jane is an expert on conveying information to children, as well as a passionate storyteller. She frequently travels all over the island to share her expertise on storytelling and to promote children's literacy. She is the Chairman of the New Taipei City Books and Reading Association.

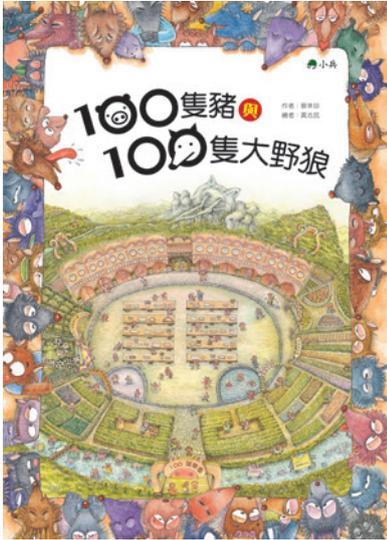
TEXT BY  
 TSAI  
 SHING-JANE  
 蔡幸珍

ILLUSTRATED BY  
 HUANG  
 CHIH-MING  
 黃志民

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- Category: Picture book
  - Publisher: Little Soldier
  - Date: 2/2016
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 booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
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  - Size: 21 x 29.7 cm
- 



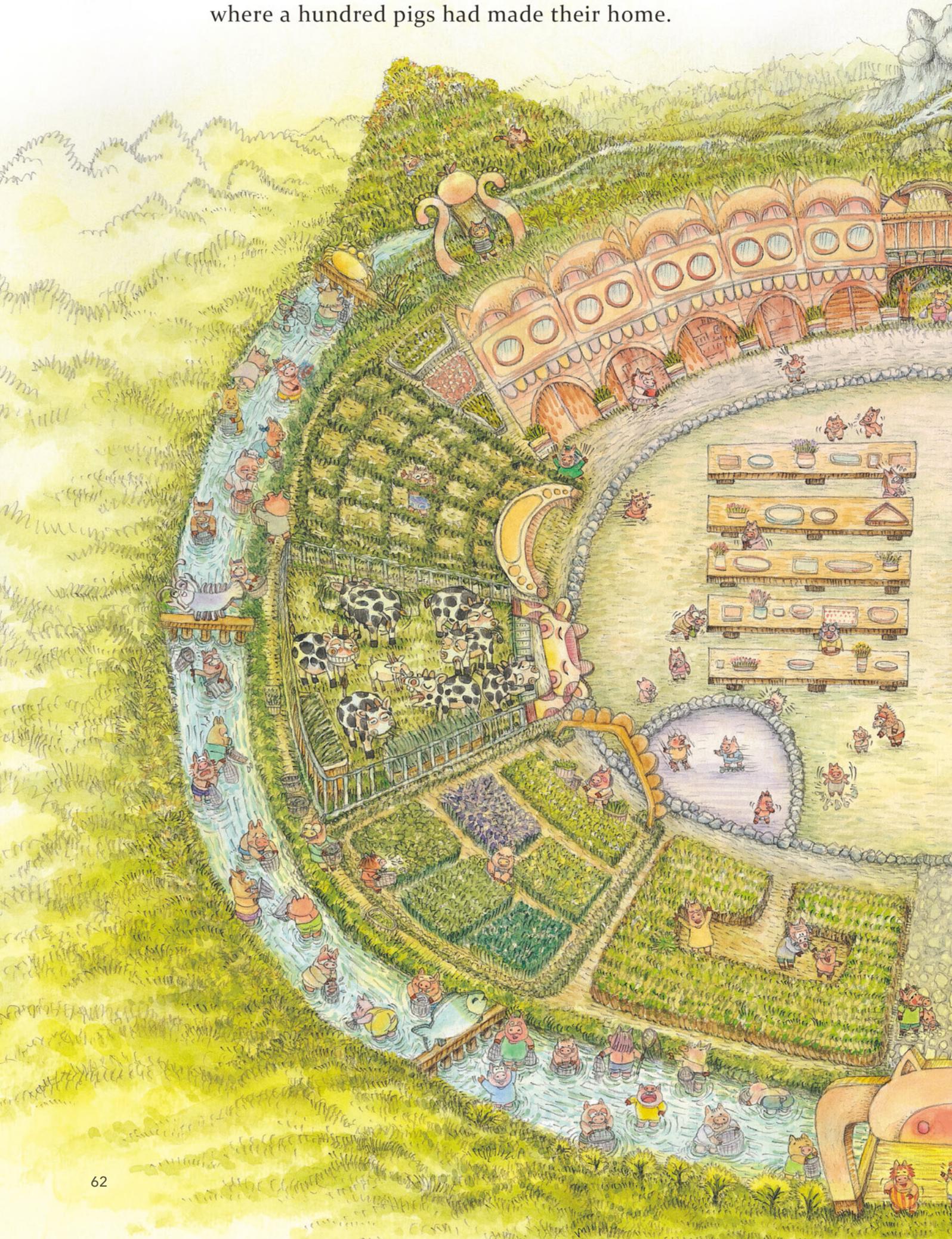
Huang Chih-Ming has been drawing since he was fifteen. Yet he taught in elementary schools for thirty years before leaving education and becoming an illustrator at age 51. His first book, *Ali Loves Animals*, won the third Feng Zikai Children's Literature Award. He has also published *Talking Big* and *Who's Your Baby?*



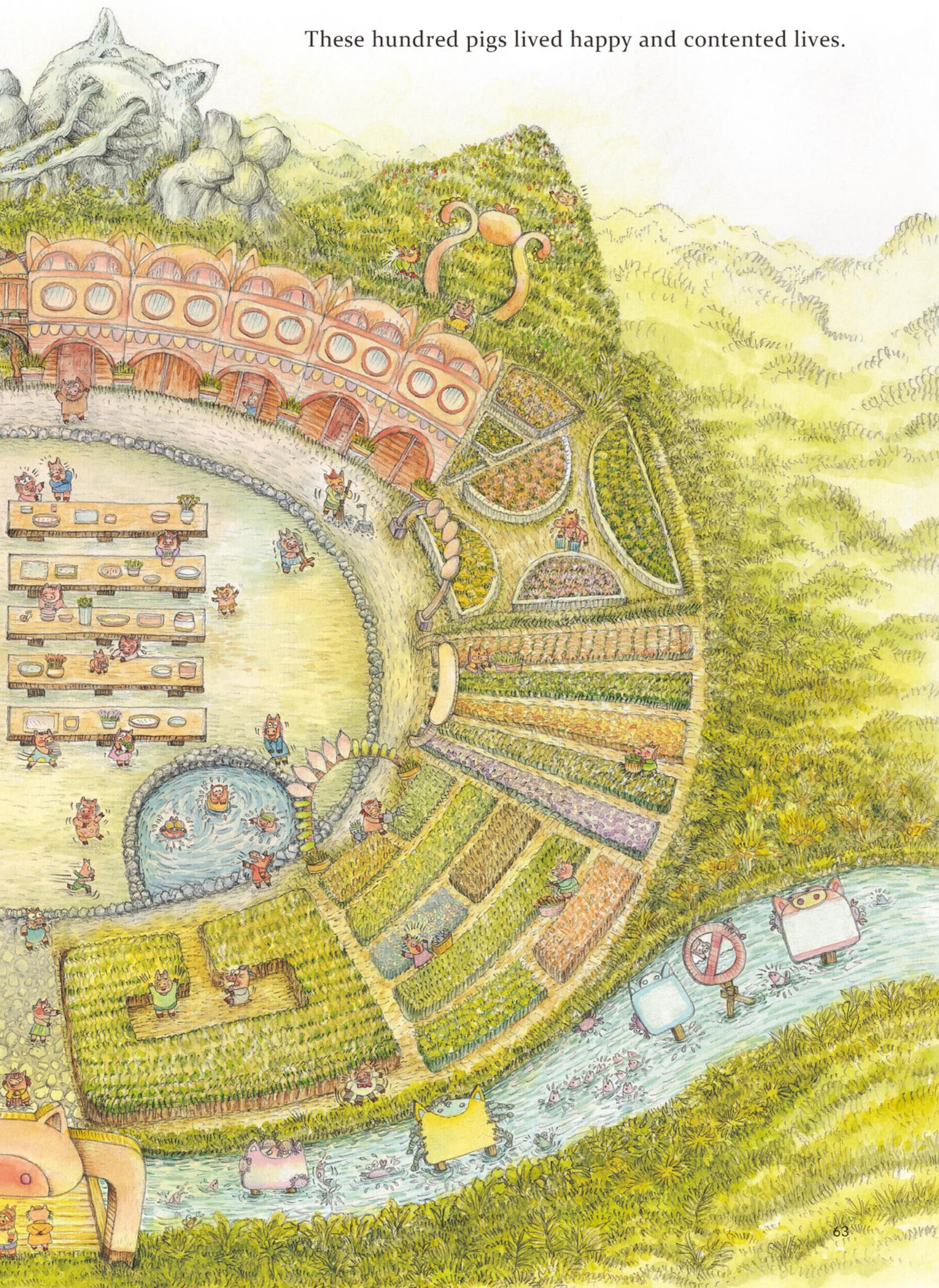
Little Pig Paradise is an harmonious, orderly kingdom of one hundred pigs, full of industry, happiness, and family feeling. One day, a group of one hundred starving wolves approaches their borders. At first, they eye the pigs hungrily; yet eventually, they remember what happens to wolves in stories who try to eat pigs. Resolved to act differently, they approach the residents of Little Pig Paradise with an idea for another kind of feast entirely.

Wolves and pigs – what more do you need? Tsai Shing-Jane takes an old fairy tale and turns it on its head in just six pages, replete with Huang Chih-Ming's hilarious depictions of two hundred utterly individual pigs and wolves, each with his or her own face, form, and story. As with all good children's literature, this title invokes a world of imagined possibilities with only a few pages of text and illustration.

A long, long time ago, there was a place called Little Pig Paradise where a hundred pigs had made their home.



These hundred pigs lived happy and contented lives.



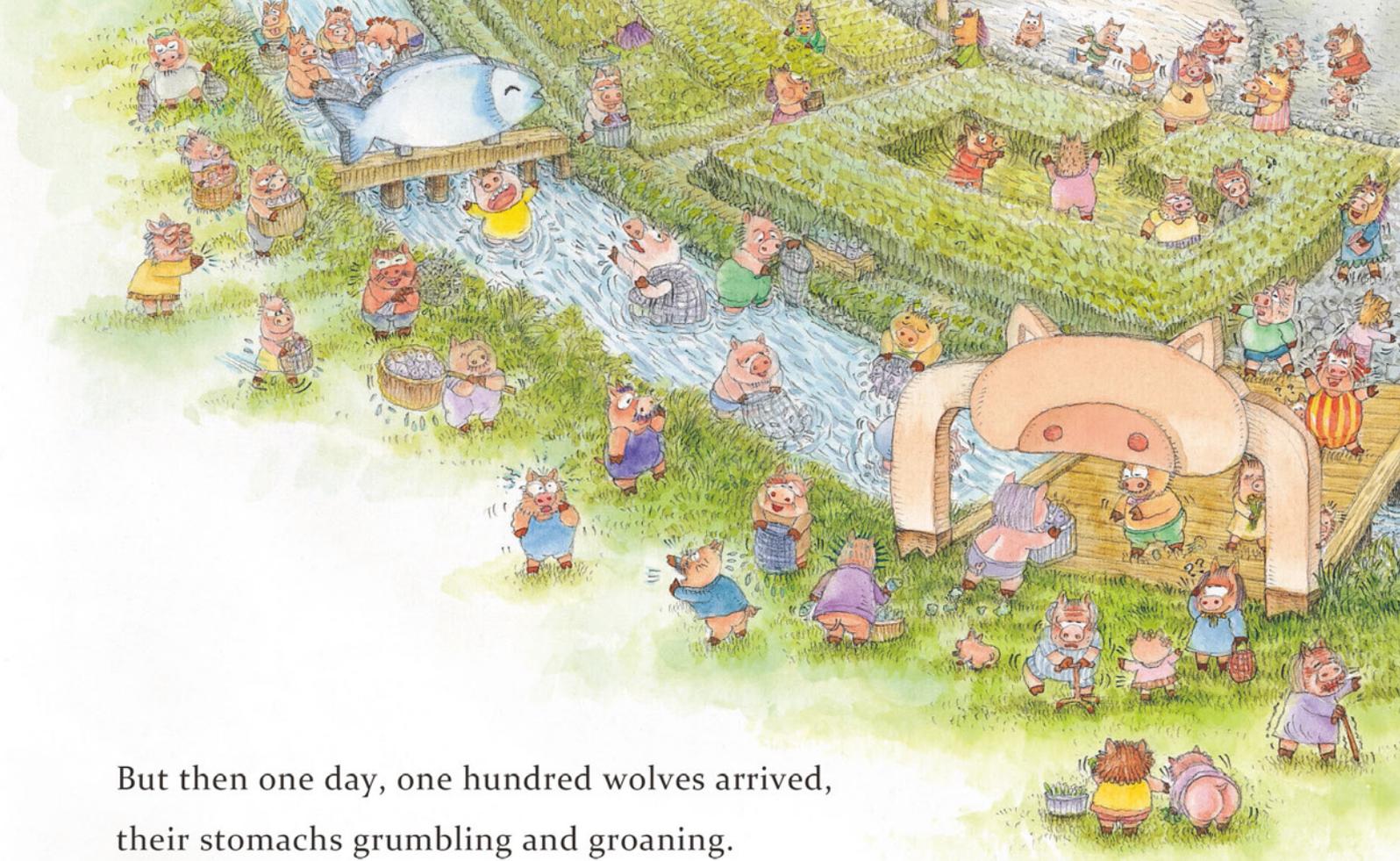


Ten little pigs spent their days playing games.

Ten baby pigs were there to wail and cry.

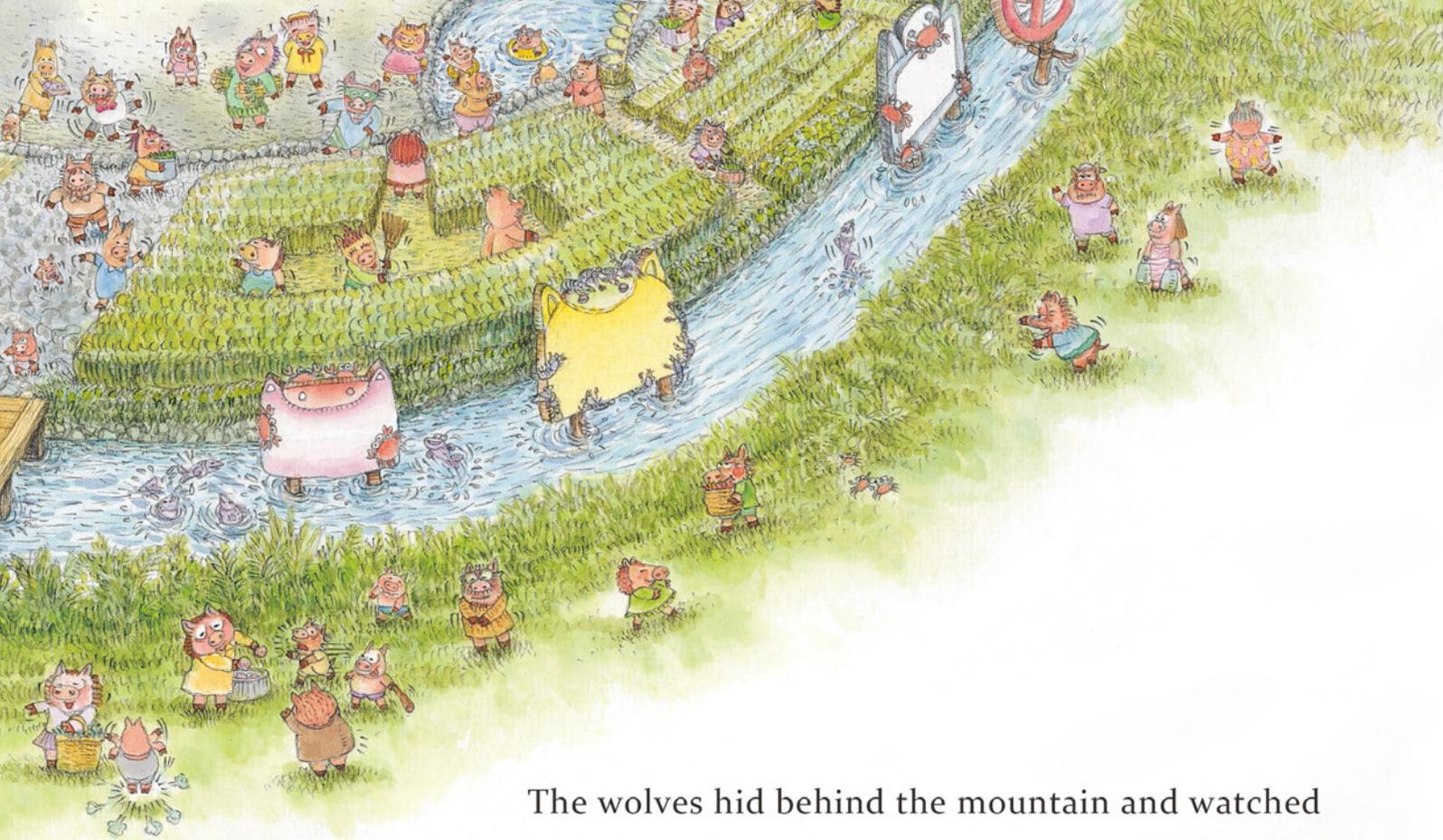


And of course, there were the ten Grandma pigs and ten Grandpa pigs whose job it was to sing and dance and read stories. Theirs was the most important job of all.



But then one day, one hundred wolves arrived,  
their stomachs grumbling and groaning.





The wolves hid behind the mountain and watched  
one hundred juicy pigs run and jump around.



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# HITCHING A RIDE WITH MR. CAT

## 搭便車

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TEXT BY  
HSIAO  
CHING-LIEN  
蕭景蓮（貓小小）

ILLUSTRATED BY  
MAUREEN  
貓魚

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- Category: Picture book
  - Publisher: Yes Creative
  - Date: 4/2017
  - Rights contact:  
booksfromtaiwan.rights  
@gmail.com
  - Pages: 48
  - Size: 21 x 25 cm
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The author of *What'll We Do Without a Rooster?* graduated with an M.A. in Children's Literature, and currently serves as Executive Editor of a children's book publishing house. Her work has been shortlisted for the Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award.



Maureen began her career as an illustrator after finishing her college degree in philosophy. She is proficient with several different kinds of media, and has experience with animation as well as still visual art. She collaborated with Hsiao Ching-Lien for *What'll We Do Without a Rooster?*



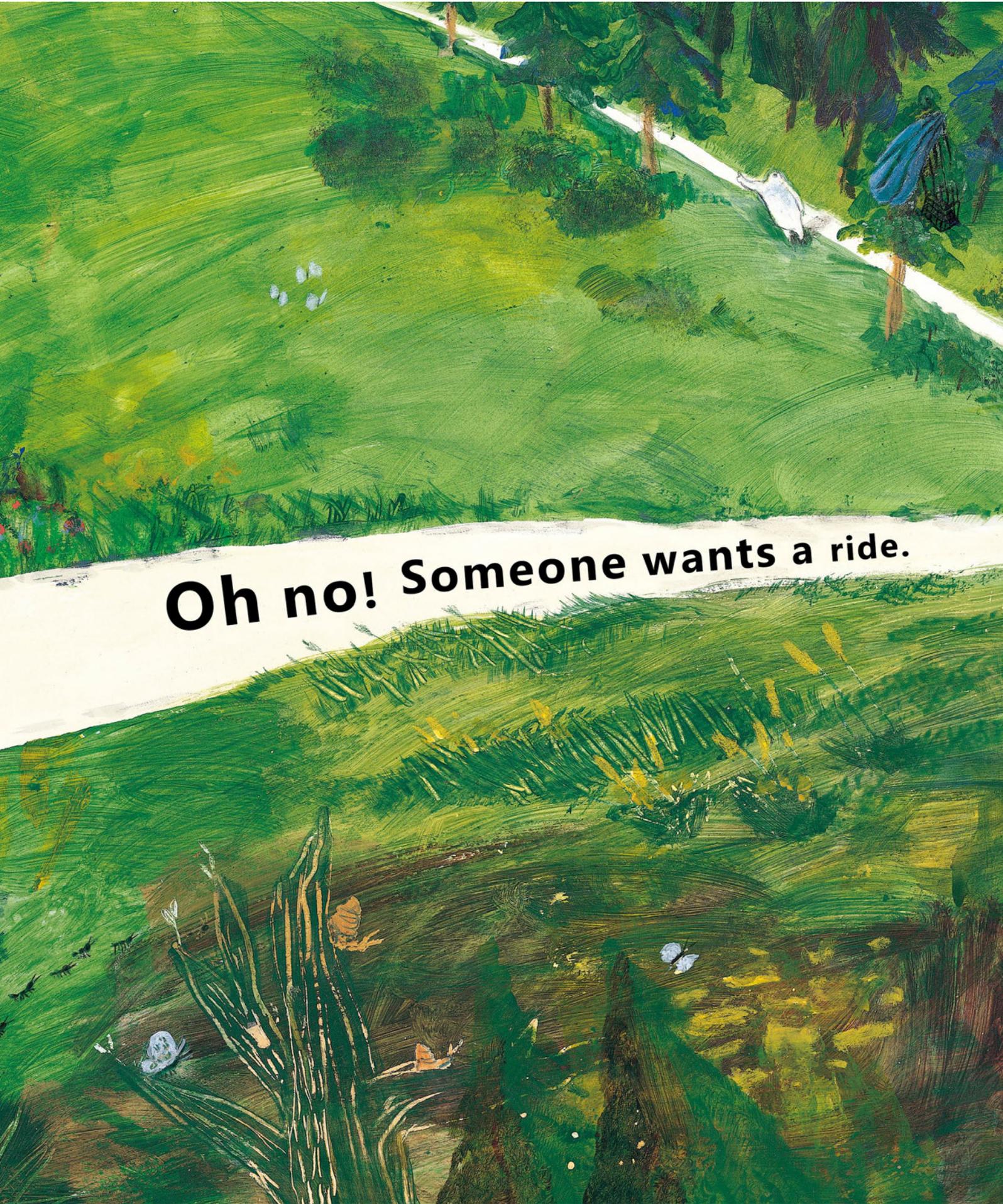
**M**r. Cat has just built a new car with trash he found on the mountain, and he decides to take it out on the town. Yet, as he travels down the mountain road, he meets hitchhikers. They're not just any hitchhikers either, oh, no: a humongous polar bear, a dog, a family of bears, and a school of fish all ask to ride with him. What will he do? His car is small, but everyone is so polite, and when the car runs into trouble, his passengers are there to help!

Hitch a ride with author Hsiao Ching-Lien and illustrator Maureen on a journey that is as educational as it is ridiculous. Teaching through exaggeration, the story describes the act of sharing as a way to conquer the impossible and go places one could never reach otherwise. Maureen's illustrations add a beautiful sense of whimsy to the story, causing its scenes to balloon beyond the mere borders of the page.









**Oh no! Someone wants a ride.**





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# MY LITTLE BLUE DRESS

## 藍色小洋裝

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CHANG  
YOU-RAN  
張又然

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- Category: Picture book
  - Publisher: Children's Publications
  - Date: 6/2017
  - Rights contact: booksfromtaiwan.rights@gmail.com
  - Pages: 44
  - Size: 26 x 29.5 cm
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As an artist and children's book author, Chang You-Ran's passionate concern for the environment and indigenous cultures is expressed to its fullest in his literary works, which make extensive use of primary research and fieldwork materials. His books have garnered several awards, and were selected for the Bologna International Illustrator's Exhibition in 2002. Rights to his illustrated title *The Forest Where Spring Spirits Dance* have been sold to Japan.



A young reader of *My Little Blue Dress* might never know that the dyeing of Jade's dress into a brilliant blue is an ancient art of the people of the Sansia mountainous region, or that the green forests and clear rivers of the book imitate the real environment of that area, yet it's all true. This tale of self-discovery, care, and support blends humanity, nature, and history on a level almost unseen in children's literature.

The village carnival and parade are just around the corner, and all the kids are talking about what they're going to wear. Only Jade seems doomed to wear the same old, white dress she wears every day. None of the kids understand why she can't wear new clothes, or why she sometimes itches so much she cries, so Jade spends most of her time alone. Embarrassed by the thought of looking shabby at the carnival, she runs away to the forest to cry; yet there she is visited by a young sprite dressed in brilliant clothing, who says he knows of a flower that can make her dress the most beautiful blue she's ever seen. Inspired, Jade and her mother search everywhere for someone who knows the secret of this flower, and can give Jade the gift of color for the carnival.

This tender story of one girl's courageous battle with autoimmune disease and her elders' attempts to support her is also an authentic story of indigo. Set in an environment created through meticulous first-person research in the Sansia region of Taiwan, *My Little Blue Dress* describes places, people, and a dyeing tradition that have been around for centuries, immersing the reader in living history.

“Why are you crying?” The little boy asks Jade.

“My dress is so itchy,” Jade says through the sobs.

“I just want to be like everyone else. I want to wear a beautiful dress to the parade!”

“Let me help,” the little boy says. “I’ll use my special paints and it won’t itch!”

“Really?” Jade is excited.



The little boy dips his magic brush in his magic blue paint and carefully draws a flower on her dress. A Taiwanese rain bell.

“Wow, it’s so beautiful!” Jade says and laughs at last.





Granny can see Jade's disappointment.  
The forest is dark but the rain bells give off a shimmering green light.  
Suddenly, Granny has an idea:  
"Don't worry, I've got an idea!" and she smiles at Jade.  
"According to legend, the rain bell is home to lots of little spirits.  
As long as you sing to them, they will turn your clothes a lovely blue color."  
"Really?" Jade says hopefully. "Granny, teach me what to sing!"  
Jade follows Granny deeper into the forest.  
Everywhere, rain bells are growing. Together they sing:

*"Little blue spirits, little green faeries,  
Our song is to give you energy anew.  
Rain bells laughing, dragonflies swooping, down to the water's edge.  
Flying, fluttering, we come to thank you."*

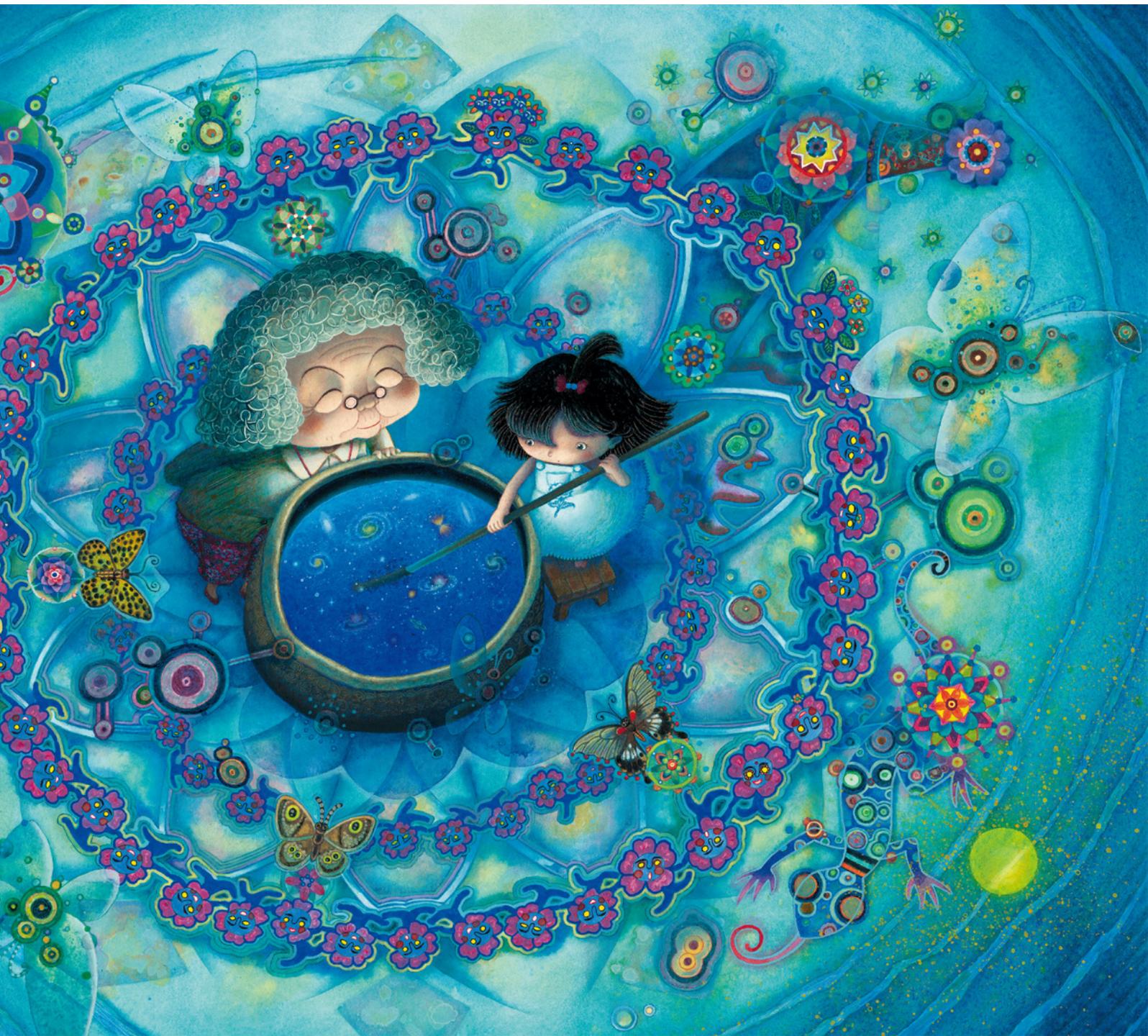




Granny lifts the lid and scoops out some blue clay which she puts into the dye vat, then she adds a specially concocted mixture of ash and water.  
“Now the spirits are awake we’ve got to feed them. Malt sugar candy.”  
“The spirits like malt sugar candy, too?” Jade asks in surprise.  
“Of course! We’ve got to fill their stomachs otherwise they won’t help us dye our clothes a pretty blue color!”

Jade continues to mix with her stick.  
A bluish light twinkles from inside the vat.  
“Is it ready?” Jade asks.  
“Be patient, my child,” Granny says putting the lid back in place.





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# PUPPY AND I

## 小白

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Storyline creator Kuo Nai-Wen is a long-time researcher of child development whose recent focus is children's art education. An experienced gardener and landscape artist, he currently serves as an artist-in-residence at the 321 Art Alley Settlement in southern Taiwan. The most notable of his previous works is *The Lost Cat*.



Zhou Jian-Xin has recently established himself as one of Taiwan's up-and-coming illustrators. His first illustrated title, *The Maroon Oriole*, won the 2014 Taiwan Golden Butterfly Award for Best Book Design and honorable mention from the International Design Awards. His collaborative works with Kuo Nai-Wen have also been very well received: their title *The Lost Cat* also won Honorable Mention in the Hsin-Yi Children's Literature Award in 2012, and *Puppy and I*, the story of a boy and his dog, won first prize for an Illustrated Publication at the 2016 Hsin-Yi Children's Literature Award, a position that has remained empty for eight years.

STORY BY

KUO NAI-WEN  
郭乃文

ILLUSTRATED BY

ZHOU JIAN-XIN  
周見信

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  - Publisher: Hsin-Yi
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\* 2016 Hsin-Yi Children's Literature Award

**K**uo Nai-Wen's wordless story about love, companionship, and aging drags us along in spite of ourselves, as we watch an old man dream of the dog that lit up his life as a boy. As with every such friendship, grief comes in the end; and from that moment all the way into his old age, the man raises no other pets. But once the dream ends and morning comes, he puts himself together for a lonely walk in the park. Little does he know what chance awaits him there....

In variable panels of beautifully wrought black-and-white drawings, a boy and his puppy leap from one adventure to another, soaking up sun, rain, and the wonders of the natural world. Zhou Jian-Xin shows us how the wordless story can sometimes say infinitely more than the written narrative, as his images expand, contract, and shiver with a palpable sense of life.

