



My Mana! Coming of Age Ceremony in the Mountains and Forests

我的瑪那！山林中的成年禮

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Pin-Hung's father is a forest ranger, and years of exposure have made Pin-Hung deeply knowledgeable about the forest's wonders. However, he is often teased for being a baby who can't let go of his "mana"—the small blanket that has comforted him since he was little.

This summer, as Pin-Hung and his classmates prepare to graduate from Forest Elementary School, they decide to embark on a grand adventure before starting junior high. Determined to prove his abilities to his father, Pin-Hung secretly heads to the mountains to camp with his friends. However, their plans take an unexpected turn when the troublesome Lin Yi-Jin follows them and threatens to tell the adults.

This book is a marvelous coming-of-age gift to children. In the trials of nature, children learn about plants, the wilderness, and, most importantly, their own abilities and limits.



Author **Hedwig**

Hedwig, whose real name is Chou Li-Chun, adopted her pen name from Harry Potter's owl. She is a novelist, screenwriter, and French horn player. In addition to her roles as a daughter, wife, mother, and sister, she is also a certified spiritual healer and embodies multiple identities. Her greatest lifelong hope is to become a messenger of magic, bringing the power of enchantment to the world through her stories.

Hedwig was selected for the 2023 Golden Horse Film Project Promotion and nominated for Best Screenplay at the 45th Golden Horse Awards. She has received the Times Novel Award, the Chiu Ko Modern Children's Literature Award, and various other literary prizes. Her fantasy novel *Forbidden Fairytale* was featured on the Ministry of Culture's IP adaptation recommendation list. In 2022, her novel *The Prayer of a Middle-Aged Girl* won the Jury Recommendation Award in the Novel category at the Chung Chao-cheng Literary Awards.



Illustrator **Naomi Zhi**

Naomi Zhi is a full-time illustrator and children's art teacher who specializes in creating art inspired by plants and nature. Using a hand-drawn illustration style, she aims to showcase the vitality and positivity that plants bring to people's lives, encouraging a slower, more mindful approach in today's fast-paced world. Her work invites viewers to experience the healing power of life's simple pleasures.

Exploring Vulnerability and Growth in the Forest: A Childhood Rite of Passage

by Wen-Chien Hsu

Haven't all children gone through the phase of wanting to grow up and be independent, yet being unable to do so? I believe this book speaks to those children. Set in the mountains and forests, the story uses the resources, risks, and beauty of nature to deliver an important message: independence is a journey, not a destination. One does not need to rush to leave behind childhood; independence emerges from continuous learning and growth.

This engaging story embodies the author's deep understanding of both children and the mountains. The protagonist, a fifth-grade boy, is the son of a forest ranger. To gain his father's approval, he leads a group of friends into the forest. He hopes that by camping and reaching the ancient tree, he can prove that he is capable of being an

independent adult.

The story is filled with suspense and challenges: attacks by bees, getting lost, seeking shelter in a torrential rain, and even being kidnapped by wild boars. These setbacks lead the protagonist and his companions to gradually realize that they are still children, with much to learn. Through encounters with small plants like the dodder, baby bats cared for by their mother, and a little wild boar trapped in a snare, the protagonist seems to see his own reflection—the part of himself that is still dependent and in need of protection.

However, this journey also leads the protagonist to achieve real growth. He begins to take responsibility for his actions and, in order to protect his companions, uses everything he has learned to guide them out of danger. At the same time, he starts to accept his own vulnerabilities

and limitations. Through conversations during the journey, the companions also gradually understand their own motivations for joining the adventure: on one hand, they crave more freedom, but on the other, they also long for their parents' attention and approval.

This book serves not only as an ecology and survival guide to the subtropical forests but also as a children's story that guides kids in facing their own fragilities and capabilities. The title, "My Mana," symbolizes not only the protagonist's small comfort object—a beloved blanket that he's named mana—but also serves as a metaphor for childhood and a primary family. The subtitle, "Coming of Age Ceremony" points to the inevitable journey everyone must take in their lives.

Whether through experiences in

nature or everyday life, we all need to learn about the world around us. This includes understanding the names of things and learning how to navigate different situations. These lessons help us gradually grow toward independence and maturity, shaping us into responsible adults.

This book is dedicated to all children who long to grow—and to all parents who wish to understand the desires hidden in their children's hearts.

Wen-Chien Hsu possesses a free-spirited soul. She has worked at a LGBTQ+ organizations, the 113 Domestic Violence Hotline, and now works as an editor of Books from Taiwan 2.0.

Chapter 1 Secret Mission

Sleeping bag, clothes, water bottle, food, joss paper, lighter, towel, headlamp, water filter, Swiss knife, compass, rope, map, binoculars, first aid kit—I packed it all. Finally, I jammed Dad’s backup chopping blade into my knapsack. I was the very image of my father, packing my bag just as he used to by the bedside.

Dad was a forest ranger, dedicated to protecting the national forests in the distant Jade Mountain region. He stayed in a dormitory at Nantou County, provided by the Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency. I only got to see him on weekends when he came home. During the week, it was usually Mom who looked after us while working at the county office.

Dad came home once every other week, and those were the happiest days of my life. I would trail behind him like a little puppy, eager and full of questions. I loved hearing about his latest adventures: climbing trees as tall as buildings to pluck fruit, rescuing injured hikers, and battling wildfires.

Dad’s stories were exhilarating and full of peril. A forest ranger, he was a real hero of the jungle.

As for me, I came up with a secret mission because of Dad.

I couldn’t tell my friends about it. I felt bad about this. But if I told them the truth, they might back out, or worse, stop me because they felt it was too dangerous.

I would never ever give up on my calling. I’d made up my mind and I would never back down.

With the knapsack stuffed to the limit, I adjusted the strap, balancing things according to their weight and

usefulness. I placed handy items near the top for easy access and positioned heavier ones on the sides to keep the knapsack from sagging in the middle. This would save energy when I hiked.

I tried to remember what else I might've missed.

Ah, right—my “mana.”

I spotted the tip of my blue towel peeking out from under the blanket. I pulled Mana out and gently folded it before tucking the tiny towel deep into my knapsack. Without it, I knew I wouldn't be able to fall asleep.

Mom once told me that my very first word as a toddler was “Mana.” I had made up the word myself. It took my parents a while to realize I was talking about the blue towel I slept with every night.

My Mana had been my companion for almost ten years. Once a deep navy blue, it had since faded to a soft, light blue. Over time, it had grown thin and supple, with

one corner even sporting a tiny tear.

I never let Mom wash Mana. She tried once when I was very young, but I bawled my eyes out and even tried to attack the washing machine, desperate to save Mana from the voracious “monster machine.” Its scent had taken so long to form—a blend of my sweat, tears, saliva, and spilled milk. Mana and I were inseparable.

After packing my things, I hoisted my knapsack onto my back and left Mom a note. With my hiking shoes on, I set off to meet the crew at our designated spot.

“Mom, You-Hsuen and I will be working on our summer homework together. We have a team project to complete. I'll be home the day after tomorrow. No need to worry. Love, Pin-Hung”

The note wasn't entirely untrue. The team project was a fabrication, but the part about spending the next

three days and two nights with You-Hsuen Lü and Chiao-Wei Lu was genuine. Together, we planned to venture into the deepest part of the jungle, hike to the highest peak, and conquer nature—just like Dad.

It was nine o'clock in the morning, and we were set to meet at the grocery store by the entrance to the hiking trail.

I was going to make my dream come true. As I was walking in happy steps, nothing could stop me from wearing the widest smile on my face. From afar, Chiao-Wei was waving at me outside the grocery store. She was wearing a hat and her shoulder-length hair was tied back into a ponytail. Her grin revealed both tension and excitement.

Chiao-Wei's house was farther from the grocery store than mine, but she was the first to arrive. Her self-control and discipline never failed to impress me. Among

the three of us, You-Hsuen lived closest to the store, but I suspected the chub was still fumbling around in his fridge. He could brave tough weather or a rough hike, but he would never tolerate being hungry.

"Chiao-Wei!" I called out as I walked up to her, greeting her with a smile.

Behind me, I heard the clicking sound of a bicycle fast approaching. You-Hsuen rode past me on his old, rusty bike, grinning as he pulled a face and teased, "You're the last one this time, skin and bone!"

I hurried to the grocery store, threw my arm around You-Hsuen's neck, and exclaimed, "Big guy! Good to see ya!"