

MY LITTLE BLUE DRESS

藍色小洋裝

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.

Chang You-Ran 張又然

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.



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“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.





Every day, Jade runs to the dye vat and asks, “Is it ready?”
“Be patient my child,” Granny replies.

Granny takes Jade’s white dress and teaches her
how to twist it and tie string around it until it forms a tight ball.
“Will this ball of material really turn into a beautiful dress?” Jade asks.
“Be patient my child,” is all Granny says.

But Jade is not at all patient, so while Granny is sleeping she slips the ball of material inside.
“Eugh! How stinky! Why isn’t it a pretty blue color?”
She puts it back inside and starts stirring and stirring.
Oh, what a boring grey color.
“What now?” Jade says to herself and starts to cry.





“What now? Why are you crying this time?”

“Huh? Is he back?” Jade can’t hide her surprise.

“Don’t cry. Let’s sing instead!” the boy says gently.

“Where are you? You promised to paint me more rain bells.”

“I’m over here!”

The sky is so blue so blue

The tung-oils are in bloom

But here I am

The grass is so green so green

And the rain bells has wilted

But here I am

The wind blows gentle so gentle

I walk through the forest

But leave no trace.

The soft rays of the afternoon sun fall on the dye vat.

It glimmers a rich blue and Jade thinks she can hear
the mellow tones of a beautiful song coming from inside.

