

Fiction

Group 1

The Secret Angel of the Place

Canadian International School, Chan, Jeffrey – 8

Chapter 1

Before my story began, I would like to introduce my grandfather and myself. My grandfather, Steven, is a professional Chinese medicine practitioner. I am Jeffrey, an 8-year-old student who is curious about everything.

One day Steven decided to go to Huangshan (also named Yellow Mountain), the most mysterious and mountainous place in China.

“Why are we visiting Huangshan?” I asked.

“People are suffering from many infectious diseases this year. I want to race and invent new medicine,” Grandfather answered.

Schools were all suspended due to the pandemic, so I went with him. That’s when my adventure started.

Chapter 2

Grandpa and I arrived at Huangshan after a short flight. Listed as the World Heritage Site, this place looks spectacular and is surrounded by mystical seas of cloud. As I was enjoying the scenery, I suddenly saw a pair of red eyes staring at me somewhere, but was gone in a second.

That night, I stayed restless on the bed because of the scary pair of eyes.

The next day, we set off early for the Mount Huangshan. Many people from other countries were also racing with us. We were all led by Jack, the tour guide, who makes lots of money.

“This place is as cold as a lollipop,” I murmured as we climbed up. Jack explained that the coolness here made it best for rare medicine to grow.

While people were busy looking for their desired medicine, I saw the pair of red eyes again. I went closer but it suddenly grabbed my hands!

It was a hand of a short-tailed hairy monkey!

It had a pair of red sparkling eyes and could talk through its mind.

“Are...you...speaking...?” I trembled.

“Yeah, I’m Ivan, the secret angel of Huangshan,” Ivan answered with a kind grin.

Chapter 3

But...”Bang!”

Jack shot the monkey’s arm suddenly and shouted, ‘Nothing can bother us.’ Ivan was bleeding seriously with its golden blood.

“Please take me to the highest peak, Tiandu Peak, within 24 hours, Jeffrey.” begged Ivan.

Without thinking about our medicine anymore, Grandpa and I carried Ivan, kept running and climbing all day and night.

12 hours passed...and by the 23rd hour, we arrived the heavenly peak top in time.

We carefully put Ivan on the floor. The birds flew swiftly over and dropped some herbs on its body. There the miracle happened!

Chapter 4

Ivan woke up!

“I have to go now, and protect the medicine from greedy humans,” claimed Ivan, the guard of this precious place.

That moment, we finally understood.

People nowadays do not know how to treasure the Earth and the environment. The more they have, the more they think is better. It is the greed that makes people selfish and competitive. It is the greed that poses huge public health issues like unexpected viruses.

Reflecting on this, we two decided to accompany Ivan, back to where we (the greed) came. Instead of digging medicine, people should learn a lesson, protect and respect our lovely resources.

Ruby Mountain

French International School, Miller, Alexander – 8

There was once a secret ruby as scarlet as blood guarded by an army of magnificent flying dragons and dinosaur warriors as ancient as time. Chan was a jealous man and he had heard stories that the ruby had secret powers to create storms and lightning bolts. With these power, Chan could defeat his enemies. The ruby was hidden deep in a beautiful icy mountain that reached up to heavens. Nobody knew about the mountain because the mist screened it from humans. One day, Chan chased the mist which led him to the mountain. It was as green as an emerald but frozen in ice. The mist disappeared into a fissure and Chan squeezed in and explored a secret passageway that the guardian dinosaurs and golden dragons didn't know about.

Chan got lost in the twisting tunnels but then he saw a glowing red cave. He went in, and grabbed the secret ruby. “This will give me lightning powers, magic powers, darkness powers, fire powers, and hurricane powers,” he laughed. Chan was a cruel man and he decided to try out his powers. Chan ran outside into the daylight. Holding the ruby, Chan used his darkness powers and everything turned dark purple. Thousands of sparkling diamonds appeared. Chan exclaimed, “I will be rich!” When he tried to seize the diamonds, they ran away. The diamonds were the eyes of the petrified gazelles, antelopes, lions and tigers. Next, Chan used his hurricane power. The angry hurricane appeared, but it blew the creatures to safety. “Why is this happening?” whispered the animals. They huddled together in the darkness.

The next day, Chan used his fire power to harness the sun's power. Then something strange happened. The ice melted quickly. Beautiful fragrant flowers and exquisite plants bloomed. The flowers were as blue as sapphire, and as yellow as the sun. Breathtaking pink white cherry blossom trees grew on the emerald grass. The mountain was a singing rainbow. Chan could not understand why this had happened. Next, Chan used his water power and stopped the waterfall. Under the waterfall, Chan saw golden eggs, diamonds as big as ostrich eggs, and treasure chests full of gold. He had accidentally discovered the treasure belonging to the King Dragon. Chan was carrying the treasures out when he fell into the water. “Help me!” screamed out.

Suddenly, the King Dragon rescued him. The animals bought him food and cared for him. Chan felt happy. He cried, “I am not going to be evil or greedy anymore. I don't want any of the treasures.”

The King Dragon said, “You don't need to steal. The treasure is in your heart. You can be kind.”

“I wasted time on revenge. I promise I will be good,” wept Chan. When Chan returned to his village, he didn't tell anyone. Everyday Chan looked at the mist and sang happily. On the misty mountain, the dragons, dinosaurs and animals sang along knowing their secret was safe.

Tales from China's Magical Mountains

HKUGA Primary School, Wu, Sum Yu Alvina – 8

My school just taught us a poem, written by the great Chinese poet, Li Bai. I was sitting in a shady spot under a tree, practicing the poem. It was so hard to recite it that I fell asleep.

When I awoke, I knew I wasn't under the tree anymore. I looked around. Suddenly, I realized where I was! I was on the mountain, Huangshan, where the poem was about! It was so magnificent. Then, two men emerged from the mist.

"Who are you?" I asked.

One said, "I am Li Bai."

The other said, "I am Du Fu."

No way! I couldn't believe it! They were the most talented poets in China!

"I don't mean to be rude, but could you show me around the mountaintop?" I asked.

"No problem!" Du Fu replied.

Li Bai said, "Let's show her the stunning waterfalls first."

We followed Li Bai. His eyes were glistening. He said, "Behold! The most gorgeous landscape in China!"

I was stunned. Li Bai walked backward, admiring the picturesque waterfall. Then he walked further backward, and stumbled off the cliff! Du Fu and I were so shocked.

I called out, "Li Bai!"

Du Fu thought fast. He chanted something mysterious, and a beautiful dragon landed on the mountain.

"Oh no!" I screamed, "I'm too young to die!"

Du Fu acted as if it was nothing, and said, "Don't worry. This baby is going to save Li Bai!"

A wave of relief rushed through me. The dragon flew down the mountain, and caught Li Bai in his claws. Phew! The dragon placed Li Bai on the mountain, next to us. The dragon whispered something in Li Bai's ear. Du Fu and I were so curious.

"What did he say?" we asked.

Li Bai replied, "The dragon says I have to stay on the mountaintop forever, and help spread all the good poems from generation to generation."

I blurted out, "You're so lucky. This is a beautiful place!"

Li Bai was surprised. "I wish I had taken better notice of where I was going, now I have to stay here forever," he said with a sigh.

"And it's time for you to go now," Du Fu said to me.

He gently pushed me off the mountain.

"Bye!" I yelled.

No sign of them. I woke up. Wow! I went to Huangshan just now!

The next day, I was chosen to read the poem in front of my class. To my surprise, I read it without any difficulty! It has become my favorite poem since I had the dream about Huangshan.

When I got back home, I asked Mom and Dad, "Can we climb Huangshan someday?"

They asked, "Why?"

"Because I want to see Li Bai and Du Fu again." Dad and Mom shared a look and shrugged.

"She's crazy," said Mom.

After years, we climbed Huangshan when I was older. Memories of the two poets came back to my mind, but that's another story.

Huangshan Odyssey

St. Joseph's Primary School, Choy, Tung Shing – 8

Last Christmas Eve, my parents and I went to Huangshan. There were many beautiful mountains that were covered in snow. I saw a very lovely Phoenix and began chasing it until I went out of my parents' sight. I tried to follow my own footprints back to find my parents but the snowstorm already covered the track. I felt cold and nervous so I entered into a cottage not far away.

Inside the cottage, there were two men with long hair, wearing traditional Chinese clothing, drinking wine and playing a sword. They were very kind and let me in. Then they introduced themselves as “Li Bai” and “Du Fu”! Wow! The famous poets of the Tang Dynasty! I was thrilled to be teleported and I asked both of them, “How could you write such noble poems?” Du Fu pointed to the back door and replied, “You could go through this door and what's behind inspired us.” I immediately rushed through it and there was a shining light on the other side. I heard Li Bai's fading voice, “Young gentleman, you would need certain magic code to return home and the code is...”

Suddenly I felt very warm and it was spring with green leaves and trees everywhere. I heard a voice nearby, “What are you doing here?” To my disbelief, it was a dinosaur! The dinosaur said, “Don't be afraid. I am an herbivore. My name is Huangshanlong. If you want to return home, you need to get through the cave behind you.”

I was determined to return to where I belonged so I started my trip with Huangshanlong and we crossed a river when I was required to find some giant rocks so we could step on them to go over to the other side. I saw other dinosaurs and even flying dragons on my way. We then came to the entrance of a mysterious cave. Huangshanlong turned to me and said, “My job is done, you will now need to go pass the cave by yourself and you will see a golden gate. Please say the magic code to return home.”

I tried to calm myself down and started to recall the moment when I left the two famous poets. I started to murmur Li Bai's Quiet Night Thoughts, “Bright moonlight in front of my bed; I thought it is frost on the ground. I raise my head to behold the bright moon, then lower my head thinking of home.” My tears were dropping as I deeply missed my parents.

I heard someone calling my name and I slowly opened my eyes. “Christophe, are you ok? We have been looking for you!” My body was covered with snow and I told my parents about my unbelievable story. Daddy said, “Huangshanlong is EXTINCT and the poets have passed away CENTURIES ago.” Mommy added, “Honey, there are no cottages around and you must be dreaming!” Well, perhaps they were right. But what an amazing journey that was indeed!

Spiritual Mountain

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tang, Yuen Hei Shannon – 9

Bethany was eight years old. She was the youngest of ten children. She was a shy, unconfident girl because her siblings always bullied her. The only person who cared about Bethany, was her mom who was strong and supportive. Unfortunately, her mom died in a car accident when she was 18. Bethany felt shocked, hopeless, and lonely. Nothing was right and colorful in her eyes.

Bethany was always dreaming about her mom. One night, she dreamed of a soft voice that told her, “Don't give up! Pursue your dream, darling!” Her mom was holding her hand while leading her down a tunnel to a beautiful place. The unforgettable dream inspired Bethany to move forward in her life.

In the morning Bethany searched online and found a picture in her dream. She was attracted to its environment like waterfalls and grasslands, especially the sea of clouds and sunrise. It was also one of the most famous mountains in China—Huangshan.

Thus, she decided to go on an adventure.

When she arrived at Huangshan, the incredible views were unbelievable. She saw massive pine trees scattered over peaks and cliffs and many artificial steps along the mountains. Bethany spent more than 5 hours climbing up to the tallest peak—Lotus Peak.

After the long expedition, Bethany felt exhausted. Luckily, she saw two tiny villages looming ahead through an expanse of clouds at the peak. She rested inside and saw an old, rusty poem hanging on the wall of her room. She learned that two famous poets named Li Bai and Du Fu had lived there.

The next morning, the bright sun shone down from the window and the floating sea of clouds made her feel like her mum was cuddling her. Bethany went out on a walk and found nine kinds of fruit hanging from a tree. She picked a fresh apple, but when Bethany went to have her first bite, it suddenly came alive! Bethany was speechless.

The apple introduced itself. “My name is Love and I have eight brothers. They are Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.”

“My name is Bethany,” she responded, still shocked.

Love put its hand on Bethany's shoulder and gave her a big hug. Suddenly Bethany felt the hand of her mom. She opened her eyes and saw her, “How can I go back to my normal life?” Bethany asked. “Can you please come back?”... Bethany burst into tears...

However, the hand still belonged to Love.

“Your mom asked me to tell you to be brave,” Love carried on. “And bring these fruit spirits to your heart.” With that, Love disappeared.

After that, Bethany returned to the village to find the same poem once again. It read— “We all have different strengths and talents, love your neighbour as yourself.” Bethany finally understood the message behind her dream, she had been given different strengths from the Lord. From that day on, she brought along this message as slogan in her rest of life.

Chloe's Adventures in Huangshan Wonderland

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Cao, Chloe – 7

It was Christmas Eve. I was getting sleepy of reading about Chinese poets in Tang Dynasty...

Suddenly I found myself in the mountains. It felt chilly but everything smelled so fresh. I started to walk along a small trail and couldn't help admiring the amazing sceneries of cloud fluff and rocks of all shapes in front of me.

Soon I felt lonely all by myself, but to my surprise, I heard someone talking, "LI Bai, come over here. I found a rock we can sit on, and some water to drink!"

The moment I heard that name, I was SHOCKED! "It can't be true! Did I really travel back in time to Tang Dynasty in the 8th century?" Then I took a closer look-there LI Bai was, with two other men too, one very old and the other very young.

"What an odd group!" I thought to myself. Then I realized that old man might be HE Zhizhang, as I knew he was a good friend of LI Bai's. The third man felt familiar as well-probably in his 20s and likely a poet too.

I got all curious, went closer, and introduced myself. "How nice to see you all here! I'm Chloe. I was born in 2013, but I don't even know how I got here... Can you tell me where I am and which year it is right now?"

They opened their eyes wide, "It sounds like you traveled a long way to get here. We are in Tang Dynasty and here is Huangshan."

"I just overheard your name. Are you really the great poet LI Bai?! And am I right that this old gentleman might be HE Zhizhang?"

They nodded with a big smile "Smart girl! How do you know us?"

"I love Chinese poetry and read a lot about you! But I can't figure out who he is..." pointing to the third man.

He laughed, "I am DU Fu and you might have heard about me too?"

"Wow! I never thought people of such big age gaps can be as good friends as you are!"

LI Bai responded "Indeed, I'm in my 30s, Mr. He in his 80s and Mr. Du in his 20s, but age doesn't matter for friendship!"

LI Bai went on to share their story, "We all worked for our emperor in the past, but we love the nature and freedom so much that we are finding our new home here in Huangshan! We have all the time with each other, sharing food and wine, writing poems and having fun. And now we are joined by you, a little new friend, who is not even 10 years old! What a wonderful world!"

"I'm not sure how long I can stay... but I enjoy meeting you all!"

"Chloe... you just nodded off on your book again..." I barely opened my eyes but quickly realized it was a nice dream flying to Huangshan.

Fiction
Group 2



Treasure of the Yellow Mountains

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Ho, Nga Kiu – 11

My friend Ava had talked me into visiting the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan) after reading a brochure. At the base of the mountain, we saw a vendor selling souvenirs.

There was a vintage-looking map of Huangshan among the pile of souvenirs, but for some reason, I felt a strong pull towards it. I asked, “How much is this?” The vendor shook his head. “It’s not for sale. The map chooses its own master and only reveals itself to the worthy.”

I looked at it sceptically. “What are you talking about?” The vendor grinned, showing a mouthful of crooked teeth. “If you insist, I will sell it for a hundred dollars. It hails from the descendants of the ancient Chinese emperor, Huang Di.”

I took out my wallet reluctantly and handed over the money to the vendor. As we walked away, he seemed to vanish from my peripheral vision. “Did you see that?” I asked Ava (who was oblivious).

We first went to one of Huangshan’s most famous mountains—Lotus Peak. The trail was laborious, but when we finally made it to the top, it made the ordeal totally worthwhile. Ava looked at the view with tears in her eyes.

“It’s gorgeous,” she said, mesmerized. “Do you see the shape of a lotus blossom? That’s its namesake.” I thought it looked more like a cabbage, though I kept that to myself. The view was breathtaking though—a sea of swirling clouds with the faded image of the mountain peeking through the mist. It was like a picture straight out of an ancient Chinese painting.

As we ascended the second mountain, we hungrily absorbed in the incredible scenes we saw. It was spectacular. The peculiarly shaped granite peaks, the magnificent rock pillars and the misshapen pine trees were some of the most amazing things I had ever seen. We reached the renowned Greeting-Guest Pine, the pine tree that has stood for hundreds of years, welcoming visitors with his outstretched hands. Excited, Ava got a bit reckless. During the steep climb up to the Celestial Capital Peak, Ava leaned over to take a photo and let out an ear-splitting shriek as she fell over the edge.

“Ava! Are you all right?” I peered over the edge carefully. Ava had fallen on a small ledge overlooking the valley. “I’m still alive,” she replied, “but my ankle feels like it’s on fire.”

There was no one around, so I had to clamber down to save Ava. Thankfully, the ledge wasn’t very far from the cliff, but then again, I was a terrible climber. When I reached the ledge, I was trembling like a leaf. Ava even had the audacity to snap a few photos while on the ledge, so I yelled at her.

After I fashioned a splint for her leg using a twig, I took out the map. Strangely, this ledge was marked on it. “You’re not going to believe what I just found,” Ava said, pushing away a curtain of ivy to reveal a secret cave.

“Shall we go take a look?” she asked. I nodded.

The cave was larger than I expected. It was draped with a mysterious plant that illuminated the cavern with a faint cyan light. Their fragrance wafted across the cave like perfume. Several waterfalls ran from openings in the ceiling down carved stone stairs to pool in the centre of the cave, creating a serene ambiance. Golden orbs of light floated in the air,

illuminating a series of runes that had been carved into the walls, and we looked around in wonder as one of them alighted on my head.

“You!” Ava exclaimed.

I looked around in shock. It was the vendor who had sold us the map! He was wearing a set of robes that looked as if they had come from ancient times, embroidered with the same runes I had seen on the walls of the cave.

“We meet again,” he smiled emphatically. “If you can see the secret passage to the treasure on the map—”

“It was me! I fell down the cliff!” Ava interjected.

“Indeed you did. If you truly found it, then the treasure is yours,” the vendor replied, smiling again. On that note, he vanished.

“But you haven’t told us where!” Ava cried. “Oh no, the map has become a blank sheet of paper!”

I frowned. “What are you talking about? I can see it perfectly clearly.” The map had transformed into a maze of passageways. “Come,” I said, “we have to go this way.”

I led Ava to a secret passage under the waterfall. Following the map, we finally reached a room carved with Chinese dragons. We looked at the map again, and then at each other in excitement. This was it! Ava and I overturned both boulders and searched every nook and cranny of the chamber before we finally noticed the inscription on the wall. I read it out loud.

What you search for is in plain sight.

It came to me suddenly. “Ava, I’ve got it! It’s just a matter of perspective.”

“Look!” I pointed to the wall across the room. When seen from a certain angle, the carvings formed one word: *Chi*.

Chi. The force that binds together all the things in the universe. Ava looked wonderingly at the dragons. “*Chi*,” she said. “What does it mean?”

The vendor appeared again and spread his hands wide. “This is where *Chi* was originated. Thousands of years ago, Huang Di and his disciples took great pains to converge positive forces from all over the universe to form the *Chi* that would sustain all life on Earth. It is the eternal energy that flows through the heavens, earth, and life, creating a virtuous connectivity that springs prosperity. Do you remember the runes on the walls?” We nodded. “Those runes, when correctly deciphered, tell you about the secret of *Chi*, the making of the universe.”

“And that,” he added, “is the treasure of the Yellow Mountains.”

A Hidden Life

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Yeung, Wing Kiu Angie – 12

It was five in the morning, and I had just woken up. As usual, I set off deep into the forest to collect firewood. On the way, I stopped at the edge of the peak to admire the early morning view. The clouds seemed to look extraordinarily lovely, not to mention the early sun's rays sharpening both its and the clouds' ethereal beauty.

But something seemed off about the scenery. I couldn't put my finger on it, but the clouds seemed to drift by more quickly, and the sun shone brighter than ever.

I had moved to live in Huangshan many years ago and built my own cabin on the high peaks. Every morning I would go collect firewood, food, and water. And during the rest of the day, I would spend my time hunting for prey and hiking along the stunning peaks Huangshan has to offer.

Breaking out of my reverie and all my thoughts, I headed deeper into the woods, passing by a small lake. It seemed to be calling to me.

"But there has never been a lake here, and it certainly hasn't rained hard enough to create an entire lake!" I thought to myself. It was indeed strange, but I was getting thirsty from the journey, so I filled my flask with the lake water, very still yet was shining as if it was winking at me.

As I was about to take a sip, I remembered a story my mother used to tell—legend said that an enchanted lake existed deep in Huangshan, only visible to those who were hardworking, generous, kind-hearted, people who carried fine qualities. This lake would bring out the true potential of whoever drank the water and made them even greater at it. I never believed that I had "true potential" and this was just an old legend. Holding my flask against my lips, I drank the cool water.

Dramatically, nothing happened. Trying not to feel too disappointed, I grabbed my belongings and prepared to leave.

Suddenly, I heard a voice speaking to me. It didn't seem to be coming from around me—it was as if the voice was coming from the inside of my head.

"I am the Water Spirit—do not be afraid, for you have drunk the water, which means you have been chosen. As the enchanted lake and I have promised, I will help you with your special talent—your potential, which you will come to discover soon. Remember to use this gift wisely." The voice hesitated, then vanished as quickly as it had come. I just stood there blinking. Was it a dream? It couldn't have been real. After all, it was only a myth...

A few days after my encounter with the pond, I was going on a hike on a bright afternoon. I had almost forgotten about the lake—the next morning when I went out, it was already gone. Looking up at the irregularly-shaped rocks, I noticed that something strange was happening. The rocks, lifeless, suddenly seemed to have come to life. Monkeys, bears and men came to life and their facial expressions vividly real. The pines, no longer just tall, standing trees, looked like they were kind men greeting me on my way, bowing deeply and their branches — arms nearly touching the ground. I had never seen Huangshan like this; my entire perspective of life had changed!

A sudden surge of energy made me want to write about the incredible sights of Huangshan, and how I saw them now. Although I had never been good at writing or poetry,

I felt like I just had to write it down to remember this unearthly scene. Picking up my brush, I began to write.

It was almost miraculous—it felt as if my hand was moving on its own! After this had happened, every time I saw a breathtakingly beautiful sight or had something memorable, I would take out my brush and scroll and write a poem about it. I will never forget how the lake, the Water Spirit, and Huangshan have helped me in my journey of becoming a poet.

These poems are known all over the world, and I am now one of the most famous Chinese poets—Li Bai.

Tales from China's Magical Mountains

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Annette – 10

The mountains. Magical mountains. If the earth had a pulse it rose through the mountains, creating their bold silhouette. To my eye, their peaks are the green line of a doctor's graph. I saw those rocks at dawn, those slopes that give home to so much life, a foundation for trees and shrubs, grass and ferns. With blue above and below, in the sky and lake, ever lightening as the sun rose, I knew it would be a good day...I just knew.

In the mountains, there is a feeling of calm and tranquillity only those with experience truly understand. I see green bushes situated on the jagged edges of the mystic mountains like a swirling, twirling, curving, spinning, never-ending spiral staircase leading up to an emerald tower. I hear the soft, comforting rustle of the gentle leaves nestled upon the mahogany branches of the viridescent trees. I smell lichen and moss, a very wet aroma and pine bark. I conceive it tastes like pineapple. Sometimes it smells more like butterscotch or vanilla. I taste the glacé flavour of bonbons in the fruit trees and a bittersweet scent of rocky mountains. It's a blessing, isn't it? The beauty of nature.

"Honey, there's a special guest waiting for you downstairs!" Mum called. I hollered back, "Coming!" My heartbeat flowed rapidly in my chest. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. "Where is it, where is it, come on..." I muttered frustratedly. My brows scrunched up in concentration as I squinted at the minuscule letters on the spine of each book. They were bound by several thick layers of old, worn leather and the pages were yellowed and faded. Must have come from one of those antique shops Mum loves, I thought. Nonetheless, I had not found what I wanted.

Patience. Persistence. Determination. My three most prodigious virtues. Well, at least, any time but then. Desperately, I yanked open various drawers and rummaged through them in an attempt to obtain my heart's desire at that moment. I winced. Looking down, I caught a glimpse of the wine red blood slowly trickling down my right arm before I jerked it away from the drawer I was currently fishing through. Though not before I gasped. "Ouch!"

"Bella, what are you doing?" Mum shrieked. I'd been caught. Gritting my teeth and grinding the edges so violently I was sure my teeth would crack in half, I feebly managed a "Yes, I'm coming down now, Mum". Rushing down the stairs at the swiftest speed possible, I wheezed and panted with a few raspy breaths.

I strolled along the dark, narrow hallway, lightly stroking the walls lined with thousands of portraits and ancient heirlooms. There it was. What I had been waiting for all along, what my ancestors had hoped to find for years, none successful. But I had been omitted from the lines of failure.

Grief. An old man sat, perched atop a golden painting in the Gallery of Ancients. Sporting jewels hidden among the intricate drawings, it was a priceless antique masterpiece. Should be delightful, no? For t'was those tears, minuscule, delicate drops of pale blue topaz, shimmering with opalescent colours like gleaming daggers. Unexplained deaths have enveloped the rumours of the crying man. Hundreds, thousands, maybe even millions of blood-chilling tales encircled the unearthly painting...

I scrutinized the frame of the painting for such an achingly long time I felt my eyeballs ready to burst through my skin. For what it felt like a thousand years, I stared and stared and stared. At long last, I found it. Daedalian runes were etched upon the golden edges, and as I read aloud the first words, the letters shifted, morphing into the phrase: "Et obscuratus". Softly, I whispered, "Eclipse."

Without warning, the depths of my mind were stirred by memories floating throughout the hall. But those memories weren't mine. Visions of dark days flashed before me, followed by delightful times that were once the present. Flashes of the past appeared, and my mind was flooded with the fuzzy memory...

It is a war. Commoners are frantically running for their lives, medics ushering them away to safety. BANG! BANG! BANG! An explosion fires out. Without looking back, Eclipse and his comrade Ben run for it, shoving soldiers, victims, and citizens alike out of their way. Firmly pressing their backs against the cold stone wall, Eclipse motions for Ben to peek around the corner to see if the coast is clear. Unexpectedly, the enemy's voice eerily rings in his ears. "You shall pay for this, Eclipse Song. You will regret your actions. See if you don't." The ghostly figure vanishes.

"Don't, please don't," a voice croaks. To Eclipse, it seems oddly familiar.

"Once in a blue moon will I ever let go!" another shrieks between raspy breaths. "And now, Benny, I shall have yer heart 'n' liver out," it finishes.

"Ben!" screamed Eclipse, who dare not look up. Tears stream down his face, soaking his army uniform with wet stains. Rushing for his friend's fallen body, Eclipse wipes his everlasting tears on his sleeve, soon drenching Ben's clothes too. Clinging onto Ben's arm, he leans on Ben's tear-stained shoulders. "Please, don't die. Don't leave me. Not yet," Eclipse begs, sobbing into the warmth of his old friend's arms. Ben's chest is now heaving for air, and as Eclipse clutches him tightly, he whispers into Ben's ear, "You can't leave me like this. You just can't."

With his last breath, he says, "I am proud of you, Eclipse. Go, not too late, end this war, and lead our country to victory, in honour of my dearly made sacrifice."

Eclipse pleads, "Stay strong, please! I can't bear the thought of you-" his voice cuts off. Ben gasps for air, then stops. Nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing like the void of dark nothingness.

"Bella. BELLA! Come and meet Uncle Song from Mount Huangshan. He's Grandpa Benjamin's best friend," Mum added. At last, realisation dawned. Uncle Song. Eclipse Song.

The Tale of Huangshan

Kau Yan School, Yu, Yuet Magdalene – 11

2681B.C., China.

Huangdi sighed with disappointment softly, and sat down on a wooden bench, wiping sweat from his forehead. Huangdi was a tall man with silver hair and ebony eyes. He was talented, his skills varying from literature to combat. He was the Yellow Emperor of China with a kind heart. He had given up the throne for making the pill of immortality, which could make him live forever to everlastingly serve the country and let his people live happily.

It had been three years since Huangdi gave the throne to his grandson, yet he had not found the right place to start making the pill, which could let people become immortal. But, wherever Huangdi traveled, it was rowdy and noisy and full of people. “How can I possibly concentrate in places like this?” He thought, giving yet another long sigh. Just then, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a blackish-green rocky, desolate mountain. Its seventy-two peaks speared through the clouds, and mist wove around the jagged barren rocks below. He vaguely remembered it was called Huangshan. Its mystical aura, far from intimidating him, attracted him somehow. “Could this be what I have been looking for?” His heart pounding, he hurriedly headed for Huangshan and climbed it.

After seven days, Huangdi finally reached the tallest peak. Panting, he took in a big deep breath of the crisp mountain air and looked around. The peak was surrounded by many other small peaks, forming the shape of a thriving lotus. It was the Lotus Peak. A sea of rippling clouds engulfed the scenery below. On the way to the top, there were four large stone caves. He spotted inscriptions on the cliff left by ancient people. A noise of movement startled him as a flock of birds burst out of a tree. It was the perfect place he had been seeking for years. “Now, let’s get to work,” he thought grimly, stretching his aching arms and setting off again. To make the pill of immortality, Huangdi needed ninety-nine sprigs of ganoderma lucidum, ninety-nine ginseng roots, ninety-nine Haworthia Cooperi, ninety-nine red pine trees, and ninety-nine drops of magical nectar dew. Quite sure he had seen some of these rare ingredients on his way up the peak, he decided it was an ideal place to start collecting some.

In a forest of emerald green pine and cypress trees, Huangdi unearthed a large clump of ganoderma lucidum, and buried in the mist of the clouds were the ginseng roots. Next to a rock shaped rather like a monkey, he discovered a huge quantity of Haworthia Cooperi. Unbelievably, he even found the red pine trees at the waist of the peak. Only the magical nectar dew, which was not really dew but a rare sort of water cold and sweet, was left.

Six years passed. Huangdi was exhausted and despaired by his search for the magical nectar dew among the seventy-two peaks. He finally doubled back to the Lotus Peak and laid down to rest on a large, smooth rock. Half asleep, he seemed to hear a soft, unworldly music. He opened his eyes and saw an old man followed by two graceful cranes riding a sika deer towards him. Knowing this person was no ordinary old man, he quickly got up. He bowed down with awe and asked respectfully, “Sir, do you know where to find the magical nectar dew?” The old man gazed at him kindly, and gave him a smile. Without answering, he threw down a piece of cloth and left. Giving a soft silvery glow, the cloth slowly floated down onto the rock, and the word “dig” was written on it. His heart was filled with joy, but yet suddenly, he felt something cold and hard against his back and woke with a start.

It was a dream. Huangdi shouted excitedly, “I am so lucky! The dream must have been an immortal guiding me!” The thought that the immortals were giving guidance powered Huangdi, and he started digging where the cloth had fallen. The rock he laid on was hard and the digging progress was extremely slow, but Huangdi persisted. He dug and dug and finally made a crack. Almost immediately, water spurted out, and it never stopped flowing out as the trickle of water grew into a large waterfall. Huangdi suddenly noticed the water was strangely shiny and scooped some up. It was cold and sweet as honey, and Huangdi leapt with joy, his face pink with elation, for it was indeed the magical nectar dew he had been seeking.

Huangdi had finally gotten all the ingredients for the pill of immortality! He quickly stoked a fire and poured into a cauldron all the ingredients. The pill he had been working on for almost a decade was going to be finished! His hand trembled with excitement as he stirred the ingredients together. The fire underneath roared and suddenly leapt so high that its tongues licked at Huangdi’s sleeves. Smokes and fumes of different colours rose from the cauldron, and the mixture slowly turned from bright red to orange, then to yellow. Suddenly, thousands of rays of golden light streamed out, illuminating the entire mountain. As the light faded away, Huangdi peeked into it. In it laid a golden pill emitting dazzling rays.

Shivering ever so slightly, Huangdi picked the pill up and swallowed it. Huangdi was immediately refreshed, every single trace of pain and weariness removed from his mortal body. He had succeeded by persisting with his good will! He went to heaven, the kingdom of immortals, with the slightest leap. As he went up, he silently blessed Huangshan to be forever uninvaded by evil forces, and famous men in the future would come here and receive its blessing to bring the people good days too.

Huangdi smiled at Huangshan, the place where he gained his immortality, before fading through the clouds.

Tale of An Unexpected Discovery

Singapore International School, Cheung, Isabella – 10

Ascending towards 5000 feet high above the ground with threads of silky clouds besides my feet, I looked outside the cable car window and saw a stunning panoramic view of the ancient mountain. Tian Li and I were hiking in the mystical Huangshan (“Yellow Mountain”) in the Anhui province. There is a legend about the Yellow Emperor, the ancestor of Han Chinese, refining “Pills of Immortality” for his life here and that’s how the mountain was named. Huangshan is also well known for its scenery, sunsets, pine trees, winter snow and the “Sea of Clouds” views.

We got off the cable car and excitedly approached the experienced instructor. He taught us how to put on the safety ropes; how to unchain the clip and hinge them on the next metal bar; what to do if there was an emergency. We snatched our safety ropes and helmets and we began to put them on with every button click leading to a heavier pound of my heart. We cautiously walked up the steep staircase and made our way up to the sacred plank. Passing through this wooden plank to the other end is the Tian Wai Tian (“Sky Over Sky”) where adventurers risked their lives for the fairylike view and magical experience. Just looking at it sent chills down my spine. I took in a deep breath and Tian Li must have noticed because she whispered, “You got this.” I looked at her and smiled, she always believed in me.

Tian Li took one step and motioned for me to go too. I nervously took my first step and followed Tian Li. Then we came across our first “Clip changeover”. I watched Tian Li unlock her clip and clung it on the next bar. “See, nothing to worry about!” she said, a bit too disparagingly. I did the exact same moves that she did, and sighed.

As we walked towards the end I became a little more relaxed. As we got to the next clip change point, Tian Li told me she could do it with her eyes closed. I chuckled along with her, she was kidding right? We removed our clips and Tian Li closed her eyes. I watched her miss the metal bar, I was about to tell her to “open her eyes and try again”, but she leaned back, assuming she had made it. “AHHHHH!” Tian Li yelled as she fell. I was absolutely horrified! She managed to grab on to my leg, but I didn’t chain my clip on yet. It wasn’t long before Tian Li yanked me off the plank. I could barely breathe, I thought of everything I ever loved and prayed. I heard a faint splash, and that was the last thing I heard.

“Wake up, wake up!”, I slowly opened my eyes and saw Tian Li nudging me, we were soaking wet and I was freezing cold. She was relieved to see that I was alright and grinned, “Don’t be so arrogant when life is on the line” I muttered. “Oww!”, I had tripped over a rock and landed in a thorn bush. Tian Li helped me up and picked out some thorns, once the thorns were out, they were filled in with bumps and cuts. Then she grabbed a piece of parchment out of my hair and read, “Wan Yi Cao (Thousands Cure Herb) – Almighty Healing Power” Along with those words was a sketch of the plant and a map with a giant “X” and “You are here” written on it. “Wow! This plant can be the cure for me,” I said. “Come on!”

We journeyed through the thick mist, I thought to myself, *How are we going to survive without any food, drinkable water, and dry clothing? Can they find us?* Just then, I spotted a cave with some vines covering it. “Tian Li, come look at this!” I exclaimed. She jogged over to the cave and we gingerly crept inside. The farther we explored, the darker it got until we reached a wooden door. Tian Li wrapped her hands around the door handle and anxiously turned it. I

moved my hand and forced the door open and then peered inside. My jaw dropped and nearly hit the ground. Inside those doors was the most fascinating sight I had ever seen. Thousands of twinkling lights of different colours were scattered across the walls, it looked as if a furious nebula had attacked this cave.

I walked inside, tilting my head in all directions, looking as if I were hypnotised. Tian Li followed me and had a similar reaction. *This is awesome*, I thought, sitting on the rough floor. *It was all worth it, worth falling off a mountain, worth falling into a thorny bush and getting bumps all over.* Suddenly, my eyes landed on a strange plant that looked familiar. “Wan Yi Cao!” Tian Li and I cried in unison, as if our thoughts were telepathic. We rushed over to the plants and plucked off the leaves. Tian Li split the leaf open and wiped the gooey gel over my bumps and cuts. I reached out to the plants, grabbing more leaves, but instead I pulled out an immense sack. As fate would have it, the sack was filled with heaps of fruits. I seized a handful and devoured it in one gulp.

Tian Li and I made a cozy home in the cave. Soon after, the rescue team traced us with the GPS system inside the rope. A few days later, scientists announced that the cave with the healing plants was a groundbreaking discovery that they have been pursuing for years. Turns out the myth about Huangshan’s magical medicine might have some truth in it? This amazing episode reminded me of a favourite movie line: “Life is like a box of chocolates. You’ll never know what you’ll get next”. More than ever to me, life is wonderful. I marched forward with hope and optimism.

The Hidden Secrets Of The Mountains

Singapore International School, Lee, Kai Yee Megan – 11

Thick white fog enveloped the incongruous rocky cliffs of the Huangshan mountains, the towering structures overlooking the nature below. A sea of pine trees in a variety of shapes and sizes were scattered across the vast mountain range, draped with glittering pearls of frozen dew along the jagged edges of each leaf, making the Huangshan mountains look like a mystical heaven that one would only encounter in books.

Endless chasms between each mountain were concealed behind thin mist. The cliffs were caked in a thick layer of viridescent-coloured moss. The gorgeous hues of light fuchsia and saffron contrasted immensely with the vermilion semicircle of the blazing sun, rising over the horizon.

And on one side of the Huangshan mountains, a group of intrepid hikers, Conner, Sophie, August and his younger sister Anna, were in the middle of a hunt for an extraordinary plant.

Recently, there had been rumours about a plant species that possessed the ability to cure cancer. Scientists had decided to look closer into that possibility and had conducted a study that turned the rumour into a reality. However, the plant only grew at the peak of the Huangshan mountains, where the conditions for the plant's very existence were perfect. Now Conner led his team in search of the plant that would make history.

The wind was building enough speed to knock the hikers off the side of the mountains but they were not discouraged. The hikers had come a long way and were determined not to go back empty handed.

"Look!" Anna cried, upon making out the silhouette of the jagged mountain peak. Driven by how close they were to it, they only took one hour to reach the summit. Upon reaching, they began searching for the plant, looking high and low for it.

Finally, covered in a thin veil of ice, a small verdant-green plant revealed its face. The plant appeared deceptively ordinary but the edges of its large, teardrop-shaped leaves were dappled with tiny azure-blue spots. The discovery captured the attention of the hikers. No one could pull their gaze from it.

"Is that the plant we're looking for?" Anna inquired, pointing at the plain-looking but significant plant.

"I need to be sure. Hand me my book." Conner's racing heartbeat seemed to be pounding in his ears but he did his best not to show it.

August reached into his backpack and produced a small handbook about plants. He opened the handbook and hastily flipped to a bookmarked page scribbled in red letters: THE CURE. Then he passed it to Conner who had waited for what felt like an eternity.

Conner stared at the image of the plant on the page. Then he checked it with the plant before him.

"We found it," Conner announced triumphantly.

"We did?" questioned Sophie with scepticism in her voice.

"I'm certain." Conner reassured her.

"I can't believe we actually did it." Sophie said with disbelief.

"Just hand me the spade!" Conner said excitedly. Sophie thrust the spade to Conner, mirroring his excitement.

Conner dug into the soil, carefully freeing the plant by the roots. Then he brushed the excess soil off the plant and gently sealed it in a clear bag labelled 'The Cure'.

"Hey, you three! Look what I found!" Anna called out from the other side of the mountain top, standing next to a roaring waterfall.

"Good things do come in pairs! First we found our plant and now we find a water source just when we really needed it." Sophie exclaimed cheerfully.

Soon enough, the hikers started their ascent down the mountain. It was almost sundown and the hikers were halfway down the mountain, when August tripped over a twisted tree root. He rolled down the mountain and crashed against another tree. The others ran down after him and promptly stopped beside him to check for injuries. His right leg was broken and he could not walk.

"We need to set up camp now, before it gets dark." Anna said firmly.

Conner and Anna propped August up against the nearest tree, while Sophie offered him some water to drink.

"There's only one hour before nightfall and we're barely halfway down the mountain. We won't make it in time. It's hard enough in the daytime. How will we make it in the dark and with August limping?" Anna asked. They all knew it was true.

"Don't worry August. We will set up camp here tonight and continue our descent at first light." Sophie said with finality.

August nodded quietly. Conner, realizing everyone else was with Anna, agreed reluctantly.

"I suppose there's no other way." replied Conner. Everyone was spent and could not wait to catch some rest before the next morning. Camp was set up quickly and no time was wasted getting to sleep.

In the morning, Anna and Sophie worked quickly to pack their things before resuming their descent. Conner was almost finished with his things and decided to check that he still had the plant safely in his backpack. He pulled out the sealed bag with the prized plant but discovered that it had wilted.

He was devastated.

Conner stared at the lifeless plant in his hands, not knowing how to break the news to the rest. They were so close to finding the cure.

Maybe if he tried to make it back the laboratory on his own last night.

Or perhaps they could find it again if they tried going back to the peak.

If only August hadn't broken his leg.

Just then, a voice came from behind him.

"Conner!" August exclaimed.

Conner spun around. August was walking towards him, his right leg perfectly healed.

"But...how?" Conner asked.

Then Conner eyed the bottle of water in August's hand.

"The waterfall!" Conner uttered in disbelief.

Tales from China's Magical Mountains: Huangshan

Singapore International School, Poureshagh, Yasmin – 10

Holly woke up on her birthday, excited for the day that lay ahead. Winter had arrived, and the villages and mountains were covered with a soft layer of white snow. Holly had always been fascinated with the mountain that lay in front of their home and today she was going to climb it!

She quickly dressed and headed into the cosy kitchen for breakfast. Her mother was sitting by the fireplace preparing their breakfast. Her mother wished her 'Happy Birthday' and reminded Holly to put on warm clothes.

As Holly headed out the front door of their family's shack, she felt a sense of excitement building up inside her. After a long climb, she was close to the summit! Her eyes surveyed the mountain top which was covered with snow. Wait! There was a village! She was sure it wasn't there before, yet the houses and little temples looked real!

She had heard her mother talking of the many myths about Huangshan, and one mentioned a village on top of the mountains, but she had never believed them until now. Holly slowly walked to the nearest house and lightly tapped on the door just as the door was yanked open by an old woman who stepped out of the doorway and crashed into her. Holly helped the old lady up and steadied herself.

"Who are you?" Holly asked.

"I think the real question is who are *you*?" the old lady retorted.

"I'm Holly, and I trekked up here from my village!"

"So, you're an outsider?"

"Y-yes?" said Holly hesitantly.

"Now, now..." said the old lady, softening when she saw how concerned Holly looked, "let us properly introduce ourselves. I am Grandma Wang, and I live here in Yuxi Village. This place only reveals itself to those who are brave. When such a person comes along, we welcome them, and they can stay here for as long as they desire, as time stops for them here.

"Wow! Cool!" Holly liked the idea.

"Yes, but on one condition: you must help protect our secret."

"What secret?" Holly asked expectantly.

"Well, a century ago, a man came here carrying a golden ball. He told our ancestors to never tell any outsider about this object. He said if they ever revealed the secret, a great tragedy would befall us. He left but never came back.

"Where's the ball?" Holly asked quietly.

"Close by, in a secret temple. You should know though that a dragon has recently been sighted near here. We're afraid that our secret has been leaked to the outside world. And there was a prophecy issued by the Ancient Oracle at the Temple of Wisdom a few days before you got here, which stated:

*Safety and protection shall the next Outsider bring,
Neither Strength nor Power shall they need
To defeat the Dragon King.*

Fear they shall not, to perform a good Deed

In order for Peace and Tranquillity to once again ring.

"What!? I don't *know* anything about dragons and the prophecy might not be referring to me!"

"It must be referring to you, dear, because you see, you are the only outsider to have come here in my lifetime."

"But..."

Grandma Wong cut her off.

"Child," she said, "You have nothing to fear, I shall help you. First come and rest at my house as it's getting dark."

The next day, Holly woke up ready to face the dragon. After a hearty breakfast, Grandma Wong gave her directions to the cave where the dragon was thought to be.

"Ok, don't panic" Holly thought to herself as she slowly headed into the woods.

She arrived at the mouth of the cave just as a huge figure landed in front of her. The dragon had red scales, a pointed tail and long wings.

"Who are you?" it growled.

"M-my name is Holly" she said.

"Are you here to disturb my quest?" was the dragon's next question.

Holly was petrified, but even she was surprised at this question.

"What quest? Aren't you here to ruin that village over there?" Holly exclaimed in disbelief.

"Of course not! I'm just looking for an object that was stolen from me. My senses tell me it was brought here!"

"So you aren't going to kill me or anything?" Holly stammered.

"I wouldn't even dream of it, ...unless you get in my way!" the dragon said, menacingly.

"Oh... Tell me more about this object of yours, maybe if I told the village, we could help you find it!"

"Ok, it went missing about a century ago, stolen by a treacherous man."

"Do you know who he was? Did you catch a glimpse of the thief?"

"I did... it was a young man. I searched for him for years and finally found him, old and infirm. Sadly he passed away as he confessed his treachery but without revealing the exact location of it. Why?"

"How big is this object and what does it look like?" Holly asked.

"A dragon egg, perfectly round and golden." Said the Dragon.

Holly's heart sank as she realised where the egg might be.

"I might know where your egg is. Come with me."

Holly brought the dragon into the village and the villagers looked horrified.

"*What is this dragon doing here? It will destroy the village!*" Holly heard a few people whisper fearfully.

"This dragon lost its golden egg to a young man a century ago, and has been looking for it ever since. I think you know what I am talking about...The Golden Ball is an egg!" she said. "I need your help to return the egg to the dragon".

The surprised villagers stood discussing among themselves until Grandma Wong stepped forwards and said

"Dragon, what was wrongfully taken shall be returned."

Having seen the kindness of the villagers, the Dragon decided to settle in the village and protect it from danger.

On her return home, Holly never said a word about her adventure in Huangshan...

A Lost Dragon in Huangshan

Singapore International School, Shi, Sophia Lan – 10

As she sat on a boulder, idly swinging her legs, Stella lamented her rotten day. She had been brutally wrenched from the fuzz of a pleasant daydream by the cantankerous Auntie Fu. Accused of stealing Auntie Fu's store of fruits and set upon by her hellhound of a guard dog, Stella ran as fast as her skinny legs would take her and ended up here: on this boulder, away from the village and completely lost in the dense mountain mist. The damp water droplets clogged her nostrils and obscured her sight. It made the cold early spring air almost tangible.

She could never understand why the villagers chose to live here. Huangshan was the most disagreeable mountain—always covered in fog, with outrageously dangerous cliffs, hardly anything good to eat (aside from the peaches and hawthorn in autumn) and it was always filled with tourists getting lost and getting in the way. Surely the celebrated dragon-slayers could set up a village somewhere else—Tai Shan looked rather lovely from the discarded holiday brochures Stella once found.

Stella kicked a pebble. Her mindless wandering had taken her to a cliff edge hidden by the swirling mists. According to the village elders' stories, dragons were vicious and cunning, with lime green hides and gigantic red eyes. Gusts of wind blew through the thinning mist. A strong blast caught her squarely in the back, revealing a sheer vertical drop and toppled her, arms flaying, into the chasm.

The world spun around her like a giant kaleidoscope. She could discern the odd scraggy shrub clinging onto the cliff face amongst the granite blur.

FLUMP!

Stella hit something very hard. Rubbing her bruised bottom, she got up to survey her surroundings.

“Oouch!” A voice snapped underneath her. Stella appeared to be on the head of a giant beast. The creature started moving backwards, fitting itself into a ginormous cave. Stella started at the sight of the creature. Scales? Check. Big eyes with snake-like slits? Check. Wings folded on the back? Check. This was a dragon alright.

“Well?” Asked the dragon. “Shouldn't you at least say thank you that I've saved your sorry life?” Stella gulped wordlessly. The cave was dark, but the dragon had glistening black and silver scales and the gigantic peacock-blue eyes were looking at her. The spikes on his back were a silvery grey and his claws and wings were jet black.

“Bad enough getting lost—I'm already a laughing stock—now I'm being used as a landing cushion by a weedy human. This is just great!” The dragon muttered to himself, curled into a ball and ignored her.

Feeling surprisingly empathetic, Stella appeased him with lavish gratitude. “Thank you, thank you dragon. You have the softest hide. I hardly felt a bump. I wasn't having a great day myself either.”

The dragon, evidently mollified, unfurled to look at her. Stella recounted her mistreatment at the hands of Auntie Fu with some energetic re-enactment of her evading the dog and rapid hurtling down the mountain. By the time Stella looked up again, the dragon was looking distinctly sheepish. Stella's eyes slowly travelled from the fruit peels and husks and pips scattered all around the cave floor to the creature pointedly staring at the ceiling.

The dragon's stomach let out a huge grumble.

“You ate all of Auntie Fu's store of fruits!” Stella sighed. Auntie Fu's fruit store was supposed to keep for the entire village going through winter.

“Got lost. And really, really hungry. Soz.”

The dragon lived on Everest, the snowy peaks hid them from detection.

“With helicopters, modern technology, weedy humans were crawling all over the mountain. Only last week, I had to pretend to be an icicle! Those climbers really tickled my toes when they scrambled across them.”

“What are you doing here then?”

“We got fed up. We're migrating! I was heading to a nice cosy volcano in New Zealand before I got lost in the mist.”

Stella decided to help the dragon find his family but it was a long wait until dusk. Stella passed the time by telling the dragon about Huangshan. The mountain was full of legends and the mists that covered the peaks were mystical and beautiful. Clear streams flowed into rivers at the base of the mountain and when the sun shone, splendid views could be seen. Green bamboo hid the rock pools where fish leapt and animals drank. With the sunset, the dying rays of the burning sun reflected off the dragon's shiny scales, turning them into stunning shades of pastel pink, red, purple and yellow. Finally the first stars appeared. The sky turned a deep midnight blue, scattered with handfuls of twinkling fairy lights. Stella stood, squinting slightly as she looked for the stars she wanted.

“There,” she pointed.

With a final “thank you and goodbye” accompanied by a smoke ring, the dragon soared into the sky with a flurry of wings and a ripple of starlight. Stella watched his shadowy figure until it was no more than a smudge.

The seasons passed and it was again a drowsy spring afternoon. Stella sat on a boulder, idly swinging her legs, daydreaming.

WHUMF! Hard fingers and fists boxed her ears.

“You fruit-stealing rascal!”

Stella stared at Auntie Fu's reddening cheeks and bulging eyes and felt a tingling sensation of *deja vu*. Her face slowly stretched into a grin and with all her hard won experience, she wriggled her way out of Auntie Fu's grip and bolted towards the cave beneath the cliff.

The Tale of the Dragon

Singapore International School, Chan, Yat Fung Evan – 11

Thunder echoed in the valleys around him. The rain lashed his face like a thousand tiny whips. Jun had been travelling for days, perhaps months, since the rainstorm began. Anhui and its surrounding areas were flooded, and millions of lives were lost. His grandfather Hui, a wise and respected monk, told him to set off on a quest to the mountains of Huangshan, and climb the tallest peak. He had no idea what he had to do, but he trusted his grandfather. He looked around and saw numerous jagged peaks standing out like daggers, waiting to kill him. He sighed reluctantly and kept moving.

Jun turned and saw a blanket of clouds below him. He gave a sigh of relief. He had finally arrived at the peak. His exhausted legs gave way and he passed out.

As Jun's eyes slowly came into focus, he saw a tall bearded man. Jun sat up from a bamboo mattress.

"My name is Sun. Is your grandfather Master Hui?" He inquired.

"Yes," Jun said innocently.

"Then come," Sun said "There is no time to be wasted. It hadn't stop raining since the dragon threw its tantrum, creating deadly cruel storms. The path to the Dragon World was blocked off, but you are the chosen one according to Hui's prophecy..."

"Dragon?" Jun could not believe his ears.

"Follow me!" Sun grabbed Jun's hand with a vice-like grip and dragged him outside.

The houses were short and mossy. Vines crept along the roofs. He also got to see some of Huangshan's mountains up close: trees were jutting out of the mountains, like flowers in a vase.

Sun finally stopped in front of a temple. While Jun was massaging his red wrists, he scanned his surroundings. There were old proverbs and sayings on pieces of red paper, which were stuck on the black and rice-like coloured walls. A rusty fan spluttered cold air in Jun's face, causing him to blink awkwardly. Jun looked at the centre of the room, and gasped: there was a bluish-black portal, with lightning crackling through it.

"This is the portal which will take you to the Dragon World, assuming you survive," Sun said. "Good luck!"

With his palms sweating and hands shaking, Jun entered the portal. He felt as if he was being whisked up and stretched, torn into two halves. He was barely able to breathe.

A few seconds later, Jun was hurled onto a rocky floor. He shook his head to clear his dizziness, and looked around. A greyish pearl was mounted on top of a pedestal, and a huge dragon was thrashing on the floor, sending a mighty thunderbolt down to Earth every time its tail slammed against the stone floor.

Just then, he heard a voice as deep as the ocean: young man. Jun scanned his surroundings, and found no person. "Where are you?" He asked.

It is me, the dragon who is speaking, the dragon said.

"Please stop sending the storms!" Jun put on his most intimidating expression.

The dragon showed no intention of stopping. It is you, humans, who have brought doom upon yourselves. You see the pearl over there? It reflects the purity of nature near Huangshan. It was once pure white. Once it turns black, I would lose control of myself, and everyone in Huangshan would die! Not just that, but it will spread, and the world would wither and fall

apart! The dragon roared. Take the pearl and cleanse it with the most sacred water. Then, you will save the world. Otherwise... the world will meet doomsday.

Jun shivered: the thought of this perilous quest was too much for him. "How would I find sacred water?" He asked. Follow your heart, the dragon sighed.

Suddenly, Jun found himself back in the temple, with the pearl in his hands. He saw Sun, who jumped back with a shocked expression. "You went in the portal a second ago, and now you are beside me!" Sun gasped.

"Sun, do you know where I can find the most sacred water?"

Sun was puzzled, "What do you mean?"

Follow your heart...

Jun sat on top of a large mossy rock, crossed his legs and closed his eyes. Hui told him to meditate when he was confused. When he started to listen, he could hear the faint sound of water flow which gradually turned into the strong sound of a waterfall. He stood up and noticed that Sun was standing beside him. "Can you hear the sound of a waterfall?" Jun said.

"There is no waterfall in this area... Wait, there was once a legend about the sacred Nine Dragons Waterfall, although no one has seen it before." Jun carried the pearl and followed the sound of flowing water he heard.

After walking for hours, he stumbled through an inconspicuous opening in the rocks and found a misty waterfall. Jun submerged the pearl in the pool at the bottom of the waterfall. The pearl glowed, and turned pure white. The rain suddenly stopped and sunlight penetrated through the clouds.

The glowing dragon appeared in front of a surprised Jun. Jun looked at the dragon properly for the first time. Its head was majestic and horse-like, its eyes were deep and rich, and the pupils were crackling with lightning. Its scaly, sapphire-coloured hide ended in a white, flaming tail. The dragon said in its deep voice, You had done well, Earthling. I would not want to suffer the savage state I was in ever again. Spread the message of protecting and loving the environment.

Jun shifted nervously "But how would I spread the message to the billions of people on Earth?" He asked. The dragon answered with these words, if everyone does their part, the world would be a better place. The dragon glowed blindingly and vanished.

Motivated by these wise words, Jun started to spread the message, which was passed from person to person. Protect the environment, or the world might perish.

A Poet's Tale

St. Joseph's Primary School, Li, Hao Long – 12

To the left of the North Sea area of Huangshan, a lone hill stands upright from the mass of pine trees. Round underside and pointed on the top, it looks just like an overturned calligrapher's brush pen except for the striking ancient pine tree that grows on its peak. With its thick branches and leaves, it's easy to pass the pine tree for a blossoming flower. But such a peculiar scene is not just a natural masterpiece-behind this breathtaking scenery sits a famous legend.

During the Tang Dynasty, a young man who lived in Long Xi Cheng Ji was arranged with an essay. However, he wrote for hours and hours but couldn't finish it, nevertheless. Exhausted from the tiresome job, he dozed off in the middle of writing. Perhaps of wanting to complete the essay, he dreamt that he was still holding his pen, writing non-stop. All of a sudden, it gave a jerk. He hurriedly lost his grip and dropped the brush pen on his desk. By the time he looked back, its tip had bloomed a snow-white lotus flower. Instantaneously, countless sheets of paper fell from the sky, swishing as they landed right on his desk. Exhilarated, the young man grabbed his lotus-flower pen and tried to write with it, but what appeared on the paper were not ink marks but lotus flowers, similar to the one on his pen tip! While he wrote, his vision seemed to clear up, and the lotus flowers faintly shone. Then it shone brighter, brighter, and much brighter... until he couldn't open his eyes. Trembling, he woke up from his dream. Since then, his creativeness and literary talent increased rapidly, and this young man-Li Bai-became known as the 'god of poems', one of the most well-known poets in China, or maybe the entire world.

Many years later, when Li Bai was in his twilight years, he started on a journey. When he went to Anhui, he went straight to the famed Huangshan. As he stepped on the crumbling stone steps, he was awed by the variety of colors a place could contain. The grotesque rocks were grey, the age-old trees were green, the boundless seas of clouds were white... Watching such a magnificent view, he suddenly felt energized and couldn't help singing out, "*Four thousand ren high does Huangshan loom, on thirty-two peaks do flowers bloom...*" When he was chanting, a low, gruff voice interrupted him. "May I ask who you are?" Li Bai turned around and saw an old, weary monk. Astonished, he said, "My name is Li Bai..." Hearing the famous poet's name; however, the monk's face lit up with joy. Even his wrinkles seemed to unfold. Nudging Li Bai, he said, "Please come in! Please come in! Come and have some refreshments in our humble monastery!" It was then that Li Bai noticed a decaying red building not far away-a monastery, just as the monk has said. Carefully stepping inside, the first thing he saw was some monks meditating. "Hello?" he said, receiving no sign of notice. "Hello?" he said again. None of the monks except for the old monk reacted, who was smiling from ear to ear. Full of suspicion, Li Bai looked towards him, but he was gone. Soon he came back, but with an enormous bronze instrument-a *gong*. Before Li Bai could react, the monk swiftly drew out a long wooden stick, and pounded the gong with it so hard that sounds filled the small building. *DONG, DONG, DONG...* Eventually, the monks stopped meditating and stood up one by one. "There's no need to use that again," one of the monks grumbled, "Huh? Who's next to you?" Hearing the monk ask, the old monk beamed. "Let us welcome our guest-Li Bai!" "Is he really the renowned poet?" "Such an honor..." The monks murmured. Having

such a guest, some monks prepared wine at once. The old monk poured some for Li Bai and himself. They both emptied the contents into their mouths and chatted congenially about poems and literature. Grateful and satisfied of the monastery's treatment, Li Bai wanted to pay the monks back, but he was left with little money after journeying for such a long time. "May I ask how I should repay you?" he asked the old monk. "Um... please leave some of your great calligraphy in our humble monastery, noble poet!" Li Bai quickly agreed to the request, therefore some monks prepared ink and paper and set them outside the monastery. Slowly, Li Bai stepped out the monastery, took a brush pen, and dipped it deeply in coal-black ink. As he wrote on the paper, he started to feel dizzy because of the wine he drank. However, Li Bai was not like any other; the more drunk he was, the better. It flipped a few times in the air and landed far away, overturned. When Li Bai was in a clear state of mind at last, he went to look for the pen, but it had sprouted something-a flower. Thrilled, he avoided the thick trees to look closer at the flower and recognized it immediately-a snow-white, lotus flower. Li Bai gasped in surprise. It had been nearly fifty years since he had seen a lotus flower bloom out of a brush pen. Then abruptly the pen grew larger and larger, brighter and brighter, till it became as large as a hill, then gradually, lost its glow and turned into stone. As for the lotus flower, it became larger as the brush pen did, but unlike the brush pen, it transformed into a huge pine tree, towering into the clouds. In the meantime, Li Bai felt odd. He felt that his body was lighter by the minute, as though he was floating. His prediction was accurate. He floated higher and higher, towards the peak of the brush pen hill. It was there that the 'god of poems' truly became immortal.

The Quest for the Summit of Immortality

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Kam, Kaitlyn – 10

Once there was a young wealthy merchant named Wang Fu, who was married with two children. He lived in Hongcun, a village near Huangshan. Wang Fu had everything but he was still not happy. His success only stimulated his insatiable desire to search for something more than what money and fame could provide. He wanted something that not even the Emperor of China could have, he wanted immortality.

Wang Fu discussed his desire with his great uncle. His great uncle knew that it was time to tell Wang Fu about the secret of Huangshan.

“What I tell you now was passed down to me by our ancestors. You must climb up the great mountain of Huangshan and find the ‘Elder’ who resides at the Summit of Immortality. Getting there is no easy feat.” said the great uncle.

“First, you’ll meet the *Greeting Guest Pine*.” He opened a small wooden box that was hidden below his bed and continued to speak, “Here, take these enchanted emeralds and cast them at the foot of the tree to show your respect. If you don’t, you will not be given the correct direction to proceed and will be lost in the forest forever. Then, you’ll run into the *Stone Man of Honesty*. All I can tell you is to be honest or you will be thrown off the cliff,” he said sternly.

The great uncle looked at Wang Fu long and hard. “Good luck. I hope you won’t have any regrets.”

After meeting with his great uncle, Wang Fu started his ascent up the mountain. The climb was steep and rigorous. Luckily, he was young, and his legs were strong and willing. He soon arrived at the Greeting Guest Pine. It was a ten meter high tree that grew like a man standing by the path stretching out his hand in a greeting gesture. Immediately, Wang Fu tossed the enchanted emeralds at the foot of the tree. The soil swallowed the emeralds and released a green mist. Then, the tree took a bow and pointed to the direction he needed to go.

Wang Fu continued his hike up the mountain, but soon realised the path was becoming more arduous and his pace was slowing down. He was panting heavily, so he decided to stop and rest. That was when he heard a deep voice coming from the edge of the mountain. It was the Stone Man of Honesty.

“Answer my question truthfully or else I’ll throw you over the cliff!” said the giant stone man.

Wang Fu was perspiring profusely and his heart was beating fast as he didn’t want to make any mistake in answering the question.

“If you and your mother couldn’t swim, but you both fell into the ocean and there was only one lifebuoy, would you give the lifebuoy to your mother or keep it for yourself?”

Without hesitation Wang Fu replied, “Of course I would save myself!”

The Stone Man of Honesty chuckled and said, “Yes, you’re true to your nature. You’re a selfish man. Follow this narrow path and you shall reach your destination.”

Wang Fu got up quickly, and with renewed energy he continued his trek up the jagged slope. After a few hours, he finally arrived at a strange place and saw an old man. The old

man’s beard was long and white, and so was his hair. He wore a long, shimmery, silk robe that flowed gently in the breeze. He sat on a huge flat rock under the shade of some tall pine trees.

The old man motioned Wang Fu to come closer. As he moved forward, he could see more clearly from the vantage point of where the old man sat. His spot was overlooking the vast view of all the valleys that surrounded the mountain. He could see various scattered settlements and farms in the distance, but what captured his attention next kept him mesmerised. It was the dramatic mountainous landscape consisting of numerous granite peaks, many over 1000 meters high, emerging through the perpetual sea of clouds. Wang Fu couldn’t tell if he was dreaming because what he saw was so surreal that he wanted nothing more than to stay there for eternity.

The old man snapped him out of his deep thoughts. “So, you’ve finally found me and the Summit of Immortality. Everything here never changes. You watch the seasons go by below, but the flowers always stay in bloom and the grass always remains green here. The air you breathe here will allow you to never feel hungry or thirsty. One day on the mountain is a decade for the world below. You’ll have all the time in the world to ponder about life.”

Wang Fu could barely hold his excitement of finding the ‘Elder’ at the Summit of Immortality.

The Elder asked, “Are you sure this is what you really want? Are you willing to give up your life, leave your family and wealth behind?”

Wang Fu replied confidently, “This is what I’ve been searching for all my life. My family will be fine without me.”

“Are you prepared to live in complete solitude?” asked the Elder.

“Yes, I am!” exclaimed Wang Fu.

Out of curiosity, Wang Fu asked the Elder, “What will happen to you?”

“I’ll pass in three days, but I’m looking forward to it,” said the Elder softly.

The Elder gently took off the shimmery robe and gave it to Wang Fu. Wang Fu was eager to put it on because what was happening felt like a coronation and he couldn’t have been happier. As the Elder slowly walked towards the path down the mountain, he turned back to look at Wang Fu one last time and muttered, “He’s much younger than I was when I came here. I think he’ll be here much longer than me, but that’s his choice and perhaps his destiny. Maybe in a few hundred years he’ll realise the cost of living forever is more a curse, than a blessing.”

The Phoenix

Ying Wa Primary School, Pan, Ching Kan – 11

The last silver of golden light faded under the misty mountains of Huangshan. Silvery stars began to appear as the sky began to darken, its color changing from a bluish-grey to pitch black. The local farmers had returned home for their dinner, so no one witnessed the peculiar event occurring in the air — stars began to cluster together as if they were pulled in by some unknown force, merging and creating an orb of pure light so bright it resembled the moon. Heavy with stardust, it started descending gracefully down onto the ground, where it was picked up by a gust of wind and landed right on a wooden doorstep on a certain house in the ancient village of Huangshan.

Dawn broke. The first rays of tangerine sunlight lit up the sky, the rice stalks casting shadows across the plains, dancing at the presence of the autumn breeze. A boy emerged from his doorstep and immediately felt the ruthless coldness seep through his torn, thin clothes. He found himself hunched over the creaky doorstep of his house. A colorless orb hovered a few inches above the wooden surface, its faint light shining through the countless cracks and holes of the walls and door of his tattered house. What's this? He thought. Out of curiosity, he stuck out his hand and wrapped his fingers around the object. Instantaneously, a burst of warmth flooded through his body, almost as if the sun was sucked into him. He looked around, afraid that someone else had seen the queer object, and after making sure no one was around, he shoved it into his pocket.

The boy sat on the lush grass just beside the fields of crimson fruit, nibbling on the heated meat of roasted fish. He then threw the remains of the meal into the weak crackling flame. He looked at the small fruit in his hands. He and his Niang (mother) used to have one every time after supper, fresh from the fields, before she rose into the sky two years ago, taken away from him by that mysterious force that killed millions every single day. They would crack its spiny shell open and suck every single juice and meat from this small fruit, enjoying its sweet taste until there was nothing left but a hollow shell and a large seed that grew in the center. Frustrated, the boy hurled the tiny fruit, where it sailed in an arc above the fields and landed on the grass with a plop. A bitter, iron-like taste began to form inside the boy's throat. Holding back his tears, he stomped out the flames and returned to his house, not noticing the orb slip from his pocket and submerge into the final embers of the fire.

A sudden heat spread across the valley. The boy rushed out of his house, only to see a great inferno in the middle of his lawn. He watched as it grew bigger and bigger, eventually consuming the field, his only connection to his mother. His howls of rage transitioned into squeals of surprise as the fire began to take shape. Wings with fiery feathers sporting colors of blue, crimson, tangerine, and amber spread widely as emerald eyes along with a beak emerged from the inferno. A majestic caw shook the mountains as a figure burst out of the flames. He gawked in awe at the sight of the mystical creature. A glow in its purple crest motioned him to get on. Hesitantly, he clambered onto its back, surprised to find that its fiery feathers did not burn him at all. The boy whooped with delight as they rose into the evening sky.

The sun singed the top of his head as the wind beat against the boy's flushed cheeks. He enjoyed the scenery of Huangshan as they flew upwards. The mountain caps, matted with green, crimson, brown, and amber, pierced through the sea of white puffy magic and soared

upwards as if wishing to compete with the sky itself. Flocks of birds frolicked around the branches, their melodious symphony echoing across the mountains. A deafening roar shook the earth as a curtain of white water came over the giant boulders and crashing into the lake below as if it was being poured by a giant bucket that never emptied. It was the loveliest scene the boy had ever seen in his short, eleven years of life. But he was awestruck when they broke through even the highest of clouds. A face appeared — a face he didn't expect to see — Niang. He whispered. His mother embraced him in her hands as tears streaked down his bony cheeks. She pressed a tiny object into the boy's hands — a lychee fruit. Memories flooded his brain as she did that sweet smile, like sun-heated dripping down a jar on a hot summer day. They began to embrace together, him snuggling into her arms for what seemed to last like an eternity...

The boy's eyes snapped open, finding the lychee fruit still clutched in his hand. He looked around to see nothing but the burnt remains of the field. He got up, staring at the blackened mess. A stinging sensation in his hand loosened his grasp on his fruit. A burst of green spread across the ground, as lychee trees bloomed into existence as if they were never destroyed. He looked up at the pillar of embers and feathers ascending into the clouds. He let out a contented sigh, and smiled back at the face in the heavens above.