

Y

ang Hongying is one of the most celebrated Chinese authors of contemporary children's books. Because of her immense popularity with children, parents, and schoolteachers, she also enjoys the nickname "Queen of Chinese Children's Books." She has won numerous awards for her works; some of the most prestigious include the Bingxing Children's Book Award, the National Outstanding Children's Literature Award, and the National Outstanding Best-Seller Award. Several of her stories have been made into movies and television programs. She also has a following in Japan, where she won the Little Pine Award for her fairy tale "A Little Boat Rows and Rows."

Yang is currently a member of the prestigious Chinese Writers Association and the associate editor in chief for the literary magazine *Young Writers* (qing-nian-zuo-jia). She has been a teacher and an editor for several magazines and newspapers for children over the years. She began publishing children's literature at the age of nineteen. To date, she has published more than fifty children's books, including fairy tales and contemporary fiction, and has sold more than ten million copies of her works. Yang's most popular series include the Campus Novels, Fairy Tales, Science Fairy Tales, and the series Xiaotiao Ma, A Brat. The Xiaotiao Ma series, which includes fourteen books, has become the number-one best-seller among children's books by Chinese authors and has sold more than six million copies in China to date.

Yang's stories are full of rich imagination and humor. Her language is known for its simplicity, fluidity, and a sense of rhythm. Yang's works truthfully reflect the life and psychological realities of children living in this exciting time of change in China. She has great respect for children and their innocent nature. Contrary to the traditional Chinese view of childhood, which emphasizes obedience and submission from children, Yang respects the process of growing up, which also means respecting the mistakes children make. She is a strong advocate for children's needs: their need to be themselves, express themselves, be understood, and be respected. Her most famous declaration, in her favorite character Xiaotiao Ma's words, is "Be Proud of Being a Child." In the following excerpt, you'll get to know a group of children full of life and aspiration. They may even think and act just like some of you when you are around with your friends!

WHEN A PERSON IS MOST BEAUTIFUL

YANG HONGYING

IN THE PAST, when Linguo Xia saw Xiaotiao Ma, she always paid little or no attention to him. Since Linguo Xia met Xiaotiao Ma's dad at his home, whenever she caught a glimpse of Xiaotiao Ma at school, she would drag him aside and ask, "Xiaotiao Ma, has your dad made the decision yet?"

Xiaotiao Ma pretended to look naïve by saying, "The decision about what?"

"About whether he would use me as the model for the new china doll he is designing."

Xiaotiao Ma did not know how to lie. He was compelled to answer her honestly, "My dad was not very satisfied with you."

Linguo Xia's facial expression changed drastically. "Why?"

"I don't know." Xiaotiao Ma deliberately challenged her. "Do you have the guts to ask him yourself?"

Linguo Xia had declared the news to her parents. She told them that Xiaotiao Ma's dad, a world-renowned toy designer, was going to use her as the model for a china doll. Her dad then passed the news along to her grandpa and grandma. Her mom also announced the news to her nanna and pappu. As a result, everyone in the family knew about it. Under the circumstances, Linguo Xia was left with little choice but to ask Xiaotiao Ma's dad why he was not satisfied with her.

Things of this sort could never escape Manman Lu's notice. In secret, she was glad, but she pretended to look mad. "Xiaotiao Ma, what's wrong? Why is your dad not satisfied with Linguo Xia?"

"Mind your own business," Xiaotiao Ma retorted.

"Linguo Xia and I are good friends, and her business is my business," said Manman Lu. "If your dad

is not satisfied with Linguo Xia, who in the world could give him the satisfaction?"

"There is someone," Xiaotiao Ma burst out.

"Who?"

"She is far away but also right in front of my eyes."

Manman Lu surveyed her surroundings, front and back, left and right. The only person standing in front of Xiaotiao Ma was none other than herself.

"Do you mean me?"

"It's you," said Xiaotiao Ma. "I couldn't help thinking that that there's something wrong with my dad's decision making."

Manman Lu recalled the day when she was at Xiaotiao Ma's home. Mr. Tianxiao Ma spent more time observing her than Linguo Xia. She was ready to believe that this was true. But Manman Lu was a person who liked to have things set in stone. She also wanted to go to Xiaotiao Ma's home to ask Mr. Tianxiao Ma about this.

After school was over, Linguo Xia came to Xiaotiao Ma and followed him around, and so did Manman Lu.

"Why do you follow me around?" Xiaotiao Ma asked Manman Lu.

Manman Lu said, "Whatever Linguo Xia is following you for is what I am also for."

"Linguo Xia is Linguo Xia," said Xiaotiao Ma, "and you are you."

"I am Linguo Xia's good friend," said Manman Lu, "and her business is my business."

Pronunciation Cues

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| Hongying Yang | (hong-ying yang) |
| Xiaotiao Ma | (shioh-tioh mah, ow is pronounced as in "owl") |
| Tianxiao Ma | (tien-shioh mah) |
| Linguo Xia | (lin-gwo shiah) |
| Manman Lu | (mahn-mahn loo) |



Five women in traditional garb at the Black Dragon Pool Park north of Lijiang, China

In Your Opinion

In "When a Person Is Most Beautiful," Linguo Xia and Manman Lu both pretend to be someone other than who they are when they think Mr. Tianxiao Ma is going to use them as the model for his new china doll. Think of a time when you wanted something very much. How did you act? Did those actions help you get what you wanted? Why or why not?

Linguo Xia suddenly shouted at both of them. "You are driving me nuts!"

The angry look on Linguo Xia's face was quite terrifying. Xiaotiao Ma and Manman Lu hushed immediately.

When they arrived at Xiaotiao Ma's home, Mr. Tianxiao Ma was working on his design in his study. The other day, Manman Lu provided him with a great deal of inspiration. He had designed a lovely, elfish china doll looking just like Manman Lu.

"Hi, Old Daddy! Here come Linguo Xia and Manman Lu."

"Hello, Uncle Ma!"

A typical smile surfaced on Manman Lu's face. After that, she tried to keep the same facial expression.

"Hello, Uncle Ma!" Although Linguo Xia uttered the same greeting, her tone was an unhappy one. Mr. Tianxiao Ma also discovered that the perfect smile hanging on Linguo Xia's face the other day was nowhere to be found today. It seemed that the smile had been transferred to Manman Lu's face.

"Uncle Ma, why aren't you satisfied with me?" The expression on Linguo Xia's face was extremely rich, with her long, black eyelashes cast down like flower buds and her shiny

lips protruding. She looked just like a charming china doll.

Mr. Tianxiao Ma put on some airs and said, "Who told you that I was not satisfied with you? Did Xiaotiao Ma say that? Student Linguo Xia, I can tell you right at this moment that I am very satisfied with you."

"Really!"

Linguo Xia was all smiles. With her arched eyebrows, curvy eyes, and rounded mouth, she was a totally different person than the one who wore a perfect smile the other day.

"Long live Old Daddy!"

Xiaotiao Ma looked even more excited and happier than Linguo Xia.

Mr. Tianxiao Ma seemed to forget about Manman Lu's existence. For a while, his attention was completely focused on Linguo Xia. "Uncle Ma," Manman Lu called out, still wearing the same perfect smile on her face. Mr. Tianxiao Ma felt quite puzzled—how come today's Manman Lu was so different from the elfish, clever girl he saw the other day?

Xiaotiao Ma also felt strange about the change.

After Linguo Xia and Manman Lu left, Xiaotiao Ma approached Mr. Tianxiao Ma with the question: "Old Daddy, do you have magic? The other day, when Linguo Xia saw you,

she suddenly changed into another person. Today, when Manman Lu saw you, she also suddenly changed into another person."

"That's because they wanted to show me their most beautiful side. Yet they don't know that beauty can't be feigned. Beauty shows only under the most natural condition, like Manman Lu from the other day and Linguo Xia from today."

Why did Manman Lu and Linguo Xia, the two most clever girls in Xiaotiao Ma's eyes, not understand this simple rule? At certain critical moments, people could really goof up if they overreach themselves.

*Translation from the Chinese
By Jiening Ruan*

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