

Story Synopsis

“Mai-Lee and Ling Ling”
Original Story Synopsis by

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Dennis Magic

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Mai-Lee & Ling Ling

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Our story opens in modern times, in “live action”. We are inside the Animal Welfare Association in downtown Hong Kong. A small group of school children are touring the pavilion, where Carolyn Chang-Lee works as a tour guide. Carolyn is standing in front of the Panda Bear exposition. She is addressing the kids, telling them about the world’s first ecological program started right at the Animal Welfare Association, to prevent the extinction of Pandas.

She tells the children how this new way of thinking was first conceived by her grandmother Mai-Lee. And... later implemented at the Animal Welfare Association by her mother Sumi Chang-Lee, who served as the inspiration for her to become part of what has become one of the association’s most valuable programs.

The students are giggly and excited, as you would expect children to be on a supervised field trip with their teacher. Yet one very serious little student raises her hand. Carolyn acknowledges the little girl... “Yes?” The youngster speaks. “Can you tell us how your grandmother started the Panda program?”

Carolyn smiles... “Well, everyone take a seat, and I’ll tell you a little story about my grandmother and how she became lifelong friends with a wonderful Panda Bear named Ling Ling. As the kids start to settle down for the story, the scene transitions slowly to full animation.

From the inside of a modern present-day facility to the glorious beauty of a Chinese rice farm, we are transformed simultaneously from real life to a fully animated movie. The year is 1888.

The setting is the beautiful Foolong Valley in the province of Chantaloo, China. We are on the Lee farm, a modest 7-acre parcel of land, which is meticulously portioned off into eleven growing ponds and one section set aside where we see a modest farmhouse.

Outside we see Yaalu Lee working in the rice paddy with his wife Kujiwong. Nearby, just outside the farmhouse, we spot Mai. Mai is the only child of the Lee family, and even at her young age she is working hard, trashing the rice kernels to rid them of the hard husks, in the Asian breeze.

Mai longs to escape her drudgery, as she finishes up her last pile of rice. Her sights seem to be set on the low-lying edge of the bamboo forest just beyond the edge of her parent’s farm. As she hi-tails it toward the forest, her mother (Kujiwong) watches as her daughter disappears into the woods, then she looks at Yaalu who has not missed Mai’s flight for freedom.

Yaalu calls out to his wife... “There goes your daughter, up to her old tricks again”. Kujiwong smiles and responds... “Again my husband is mistaken, as she is also his daughter too”.

Obviously Yaalu is not happy, he grumbles to himself, “If we had a boy, I would have the help I need. Girls are of little value to the demands of a rice farm”.

Kujiwong cannot hear her husband’s grumbling, but she knows what he is mumbling to himself. Although Mai is very helpful and much loved by both parents, it is true that she is more helpful to her mother in the kitchen, and of less value to farm operations.

Meanwhile, Mai is off on a journey in a magical place... the low lands foothills of the Chinese bamboo forests. This place teems with life and beauty, a lush green land of enchantment just ripe for the imagination of a creative little girl such as Mai Lee.