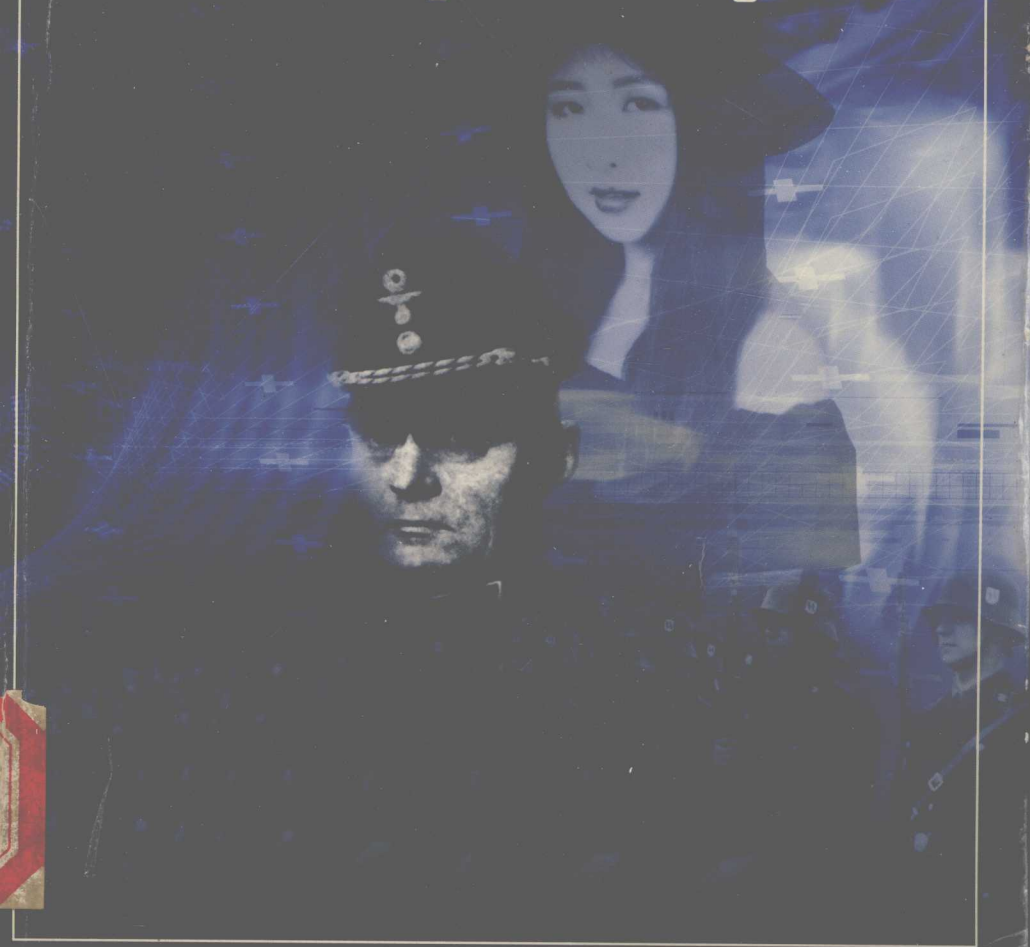


Zhang Yawen

# A Chinese Woman at Gestapo Gunpoint



Foreign Languages Press Beijing

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People will never forget that most cruel, widespread and savage war that began in Europe in 1939 and lasted five years, eight months and seven days, involving two billion people from sixty-one countries, causing one hundred million casualties and losses amounting to as much as US\$ five trillion.

Fifty-seven years have gone by, and the passing of over half a century has buried those incalculable events and memories of bygone days! However, an illustrious Chinese woman still dazzles like a bright pearl against the dusts of history. She glows in the skies over Europe like a glimmering star that will never fall.

From the day the Nazi German army marched into Brussels, the capital of Belgium, with the reckless ambition of conquering the whole of Europe, due to an extraordinary confluence of circumstances, a young Chinese woman studying in Belgium was drawn into that long drawn-out war. Out of her ennobling spirit of humanity, she saved the lives of many resistance fighters from the gallows of the German fascists and even changed the destiny of a German general.

That woman is Madame Qian Xiuling (renamed Jin Ling in this fictionalized account) — a great Chinese woman regarded as the “Mother of Belgium” by the Belgian people!

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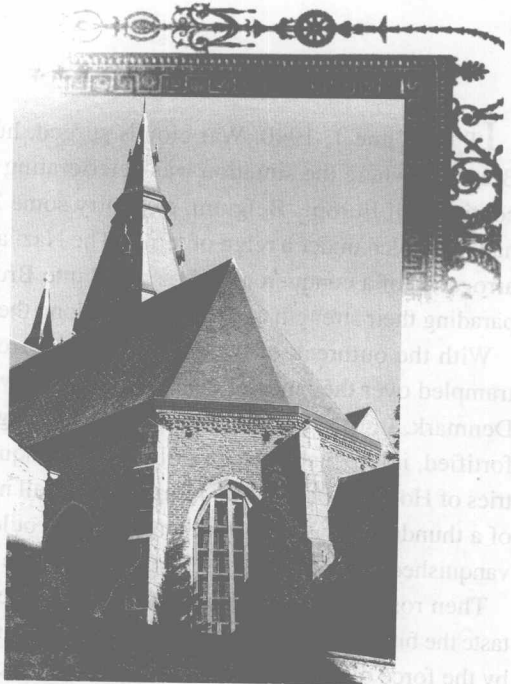
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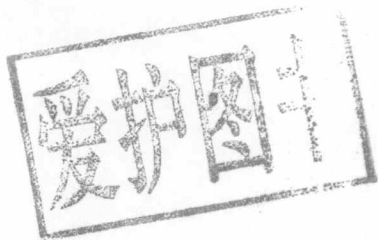
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## CHAPTER ONE

# WARTIME ROMANCE





IT was June 1, 1940. War clouds surged, hurling across the skies of Belgium, where the situation was deteriorating along with the rest of the continent of Europe. Belgium, a country some 30,000 square kilometers, had just fallen under a reign of terror. The Nazi army of Germany, with the arrogance of a conqueror, had marched into Brussels, the Belgian capital, parading their strength and prowess all along the way.

With the outbreak of the war, the Nazi's frenzied hooves of iron had trampled over the lands of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway and Denmark. In May 1940, they made a lightning detour from the strongly fortified, impregnable Maginot Line and conquered the three small countries of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, all neutral, with the suddenness of a thunderbolt. Even before any defense could rise up on the side of the vanquished, the evil iron heel had crushed them.

Then rose the cries of Belgium's nine million people. They could still taste the bitterness of twenty years earlier during the First World War, brewed by the force of the invading German army, who had robbed the country of vast amounts of its resources and wealth, and compelled more than one hundred thousand Belgians to labor and die for Germany.

The misery of those scenes of the past was still vivid in people's memories. And once again, this tragedy had befallen this neutral small country, which throughout history had time and again been invaded and humiliated by other nations.

The battle array the Nazi army displayed when they marched into Brussels was astonishing. On the Rue de Tervuren, motorcycles heavily fortified with sophisticated weapons led the advance, closely followed by armored tanks and Benz luxury limousines, and finally columns upon columns of soldiers shouldering bayonets brought up the rear.

This orderly display marked the beginning of the chaos of war. Among the many pedestrians looking on anxiously from the sidewalk, an attractive young Chinese student stood out in her sea-blue dress and bobbed hair. She was Jin Ling, a graduate of the famous University of Leuven in Belgium.

Jin Ling had always planned to continue her studies at the university towards a doctorate in chemistry, hoping to become a scientist like Madame Curie. This was her life-long dream. The sudden outbreak of war forced her studies to a halt and now she was to return to China. She had stood amidst the mass exodus at Antwerp Port, waiting to board the last sea-liner to Marseilles, from where she could return to China. But when she had opened her purse to retrieve her steamer ticket, she searched its crevices only to find it empty. The ticket, her identification card and spare money had all been stolen! For a while, she had felt as if she was fainting. All she had been able to do was to keep helplessly gazing at the ship as it gradually disappeared into the mists of the sea, leaving her alone in the pouring rain.

Now, dragging along her leather trunk, she wandered distractedly through the anonymous crowds of people, all infected with their individual panic barely under control. She had not a penny, no relatives within reach, and no idea where to stay for the night.

Just then, as a German motorcycle unit rumbled past, a few young men from the crowd rushed past her and desperately flung rocks, wine bottles and the like at the motorcade, creating confusion in the formation. Suddenly, a group of German soldiers showed up from nowhere, encircled everyone at the scene and started to arrest people as they fled in all directions. Involuntarily Jin Ling started to run full tilt, too.

In the panic, Jin Ling lost her leather trunk and one of her shoes. She had to limp along following the fleeing crowd. She screamed when she saw a young man shot by the German soldiers. Her legs, by now feeling soft as noodles, started failing her. A German soldier came upon her, grabbing her like a chicken, and threw her onto a truck already packed with people. Hardly had she steadied herself when she caught sight of her trunk left lying on the street. She cried, "My trunk! My trunk!"

But her shouts were drowned in the surrounding chaotic sound and fury.

"That's my trunk! Please bring me my trunk!" Jin Ling screamed in desperation.

A German officer ran up to the truck, and asked her in French, "May I know your name, mademoiselle?"

Jin Ling hesitated at the inquiry, before saying falteringly, "My name is Jin ... Jin Ling..."

"Show me your ID, please."

Jin Ling grew terrified at this request. She blurted out hurriedly, "I'm sorry. I'm a Chinese student. I've lost my ID and ticket."

At her words, the officer turned to leave.

Jin Ling became even more puzzled and terrified: why did the German ask my name? What does he want? Is he going to kill me? A train of terrible questions roared across her mind.

Just then, an awe-inspiring German general in a well-trimmed uniform stepped out from a Benz. He came directly to the truck and sized Jin Ling up and down with a look of surprise. In panic, Jin Ling fixed her gleaming eyes on him, at a loss as to what he was after.

The German general proceeded to order a soldier to untie the rope that bound Jin Ling and help her down.

"Don't you recognize me?" asked the general.

Perplexed by this powerful, sharp-featured man, Jin Ling shook her head.

"Have you really forgotten me?" the general asked again.

Jin Ling shook her head. She now realized she had met him before, but she just could not make out who he was.

"I'm General Hoffmann!" said the man suddenly, in Chinese.

Startled, Jin Ling asked in Chinese, "You are really General Hoffmann?"

"Yes, I am."

Eyes wide open, Jin Ling looked carefully at him. The deep-set grayish blue eyes, the masculine, slightly arrogant corners of his mouth, the shining broad forehead, all so much the German ideal — all these gradually brought her mind's eye to focus on an image of the foreigner who had once stayed with her family to convalesce.

Now as she recognized her old friend, all the suffering, all the bitterness

and resentment she had encountered that day welled up in her heart, her eyes suddenly brimming over with tears. "Oh, General Hoffmann..." she sobbed.

Hoffmann reached out to hold her icy-cold hands in his, and spoke in an apologetic tone, "I'm sorry, Mlle Jin Ling. You must have been wronged."

"General Hoffmann, what are you doing here?"

"I've been sent here to be Governor General in charge of military and political affairs in Belgium."

"Governor General of Belgium?" Jin Ling was stunned, instantly wishing his words were not true. She knew that Germany had invaded Belgium and the Belgian king had announced surrender to the invaders. She knew enough of the situation to be clear she would not wish this foreign uncle of hers to become a governor in this country not his own.

"Yes, this is my first day in office. You're surprised, are you?"

"Yes. I didn't expect..."

"I didn't expect it either. Well, I have many things I must do. Please tell me, where do you live?"

Jin Ling hesitated. "I'll write it down and send it to you, and your address is..."

"Ah, just put it like this: 'General Hoffmann, Governor General's Residence, Château de Seneffe.' I look forward to hearing from you." Holding her hands, he said with affection, "I'm so glad to see you again, Mlle Jin Ling. See you soon!"

"See you..."

The limousine drove away, leaving Jin Ling dumbfounded for the entire ensuing time it took the German units to move on. Finally, with an enveloping sense of loss, she absentmindedly set about looking for her shoe and leather trunk. Turning round, she saw a strong, handsome young man walking towards her, carrying her trunk and shoe, and smiling.

"Ah, thank you..." Jin Ling quickly took over her belongings.

"You're welcome, Mlle Jin Ling." The young man held out his hand and introduced himself, "Allow me, I'm Victor, Victor Aleva, a doctor."

"Oh, how do you know my name?" Jin Ling was surprised. She had no idea who this young man was.

"I'm a graduate of the University of Leuven. We were college mates. I've enjoyed your performances of Chinese music on several occasions. I'm a big fan."

"Really?" Jin Ling stared at the brown-haired, thick-browed young man.

"Absolutely, I swear," said Victor earnestly.

"Ah, that's great!" Jin Ling felt somewhat relieved at meeting a school-mate at such an awful moment.

She put her shoe on and picked up her leather trunk. Reaching out her hand, she bade him goodbye, "Bye for now! And thank you..."

"Tell me please, where you are heading?" Victor asked enthusiastically, "May I see you home?"

"No, thank you. Actually, I don't know where to go..." She remembered she did not have a penny in her pocket.

"Well, if you'd like, you could come to the small town where I live." Victor, having seen the worried look on her face, warmly extended the invitation to her. "You could work at my clinic."

Jin Ling smiled shyly. "I don't want to trouble you."

"It's no trouble. My clinic actually needs a nurse."

"But I studied chemistry..."

"That doesn't matter. Giving injections or measuring out dosages won't be more difficult than the nuisance of chemical symbols," Victor offered humorously.

"But I..."

"I shall give you the highest salary."

Thus, this graceful young Chinese woman with large limpid eyes, like a terrified deer just loosed from the hot pursuit of hunters, climbed onto the horse-drawn cart that her unknown college mate somehow managed to muster, and sat down beside him.

As soon as she was seated on the cart, however, she began regretting being so easily convinced by this Victor. She had never seen him on campus before, nor did she know what kind of person he was. And here they were heading towards a town, a destination totally strange to her.

Victor, however, broke the silence with his chatty enthusiasm and candor.

"Mlle Jin Ling, you look so worried. I imagine you must be thinking: 'I don't know this former student at all. How can I follow a strange man to a strange place?' Rest assured. I'm a graduate of medicine from the University of Leuven, three years senior to you. I'll even show you my diploma when we get back. Of course, you might still be worried about what language we speak in our small town. Ah, this is no problem at all. We are Walloon. We speak a French dialect, and are Catholics. You should know that Belgium has two peoples, the Flemish and the Walloon... Ah, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said this to you. You must already know all this well enough."

Jin Ling was of course quite familiar with the backgrounds of these two peoples. The Flemish were related to the Dutch, so they spoke Flemish; the Walloon to the Gaul, so they spoke French. Therefore, a rather unique phenomenon had arisen among Belgian officialdom: aside from the king and prime minister, the cabinet had to be comprised of members from these two peoples.

But at this moment, she was in no mood to discuss such social issues with him. She only smiled politely.

Yet, her companion, in high spirits, remained still garrulous with wit and humor.

"Perhaps you're most worried who my family might be... Oh, don't you worry about that. There are three of us in my family. My mother, a kind old lady, too kind at times. I'm sure you will love her as soon as you see her sweet face. The other is called Torry, a dog, who'll raise both hairy paws to welcome you. I should also mention, it used to be very convenient to travel from our small town to Brussels. There were buses running between every day. But several days ago, the damned Germans ordered them to stop running." He smiled at Jin Ling apologetically. In a casual tone, he asked, "It seems you know that German general?"

"Yes. My father once treated him in China when he was wounded." Jin Ling tried to brush the topic aside.

After an hour's bumpy ride, it was twilight when the cart entered the town of Eldelemon, south of Brussels.

It was a typical European town, clean, simple-looking. Lining the black-stone-paved streets were gray houses surrounded by white or blue fences. At this late hour of the day, the streets were deserted, illuminated only by the pleasant soft light spilling out of the windows of the houses. At intervals one could glimpse a family with both the young and the old sitting around a table having their supper. Pigeon nests could be found on many of the roofs, and the birds' coos wafted through the air from time to time.

Belgium was the kingdom of pigeons, the cradle of international homing-pigeon competitions. All the Belgians loved to raise pigeons, a hobby they were known for worldwide. Before war had broken out, an international homing-pigeon competition used to be held annually in Belgium. Master trainers of homing pigeons would gather here to compete to be the ultimate winner. On those days when the pigeons took wing, the sky would turn into a realm of circling birds, a spectacular sight resembling thousands of distant sails floating on the sea or thousands of butterflies fluttering through the skies.

In the misty twilight, one could see the pointed church spire looming in the distance, and hear the melodious tolling of a bell. These age-old tolls lingered, intimate and warm, always soothing people's hearts.

After her terrible encounter in the turbulent metropolis that reeked of encroaching war, Jin Ling felt herself relaxed in this serene town. Yet, this comfort was quickly snatched from her when a snarl of motors whizzed by. The tranquility of this small town thus broke, too.

Two German military vehicles sped past them. In the lead was a truck teeming with helmeted soldiers carrying bayonets. Followed closely behind was a jeep, and behind the wheel a German officer could be vaguely perceived, a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

The two vehicles pulled up in front of a hotel. Soldiers and officers jumped off, carrying their baggage. Suddenly, a big brown dog jumped out from nowhere and barked at the uninvited guests. Its barks attracted the attention of many of its peers, who came out of the houses and closed in on these strange invaders, all barking ferociously.

More and more dogs joined in the protest and the town was drowned in a

crescendo of barking.

Welcomed with such uncalled-for ceremony, the German soldiers and officers all quickly flared up. The captain strode out of the jeep and aimed his gun at the brown dog that had begun the chorus. He was an excellent shooter, and his bullet directly struck the skull of the creature. With a short miserable whimper, the dog fell to the ground, dead.

The captain set the example for his soldiers, who shot at the fleeing dogs as if competing to show off their own marksmanship. In the blink of an eye, a dozen dogs died under the muzzles of German guns. A grayish hound, the dog of the Alevas', somehow escaped after a soldier missed it several times, rousing the derisive laughter of his mates, who mocked him, calling him stupid.

All this left the three people on the carriage dumbfounded. Jin Ling turned pale, shivering, and cried involuntarily, "Oh, good heavens... Mercy on us..."

Seeing Jin Ling in such terror, Victor said, "I'm sorry you've been frightened again. Stay here. Don't go anywhere. I'm going to take a look." He jumped off the carriage and ran towards the hotel.

Hearing the shots, many people had run out in panic in the direction of the hotel. Children, seeing their pets dead on the ground, threw themselves on the limp carcasses and burst into grievous tears. The adults, afraid that they would cause more trouble, hurried over to pull their children away.

After all, tragedies did happen.

The soldiers were still making fun of their mate who had missed its target. "You're a big dummy. Missed a dog. And you'll miss a person for sure!"

These words aggravated the foolish soldier, provoking the snuffing out of an innocent young life. A little boy, with sea-blue eyes, was following behind his mother, and holding his dead pet named Tony and crying. Suddenly, a vicious bullet whizzed toward him. This time the scoundrel soldier found his target and the boy slumped to the ground, his brains strewn on the road, blood spewing.

The suddenness of what had happened shocked the mother into total paralysis. For a moment, she was suspended in disbelief, unable to compre-



hend what on earth had transpired. Then throwing herself on her son, she burst into heart-rending cries: "My Verga — my son! Oh, why did they kill my boy... Why my boy..."

This savage killing immediately ignited people's fury. They all gathered around the stricken mother and her son, shouting angrily: "These brutes are beyond any reason! They have no human feeling!"

"It's an unpardonable crime to kill an innocent child!"

Seeing his son shot, the railway worker Praxy became enraged. "Bastard! Come on, let's fight..." Like a mad bull, he rushed out of the crowd, disregarding everything. "No — don't hold me back — I'm going to fight these bastards to the death!" His frenzy gave him such strength that nobody could stop him, though people tried. He was about to free himself from their grips when a crisp, resolute slap struck him across the face. It was Victor who gave him the blow.

Praxy was dumbfounded, staring fiercely at Victor.

"Look around you!" Victor snapped in a stern tone.

People looked round and all became shocked breathless. A unit of German soldiers, holding bayonets level, was edging forward towards them as menacingly as a tiger about to pounce on its prey. The hawk-nosed, vulture-eyed captain, who had been the first to shoot the dogs, stood aside with his cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, looking on with arrogance and cold contempt at the ensuing clash.

This captain, Adolf von Jurie, was a Nazi fanatic. At the moment, he was looking forward to a confrontation. He was hoping that the conflict would demonstrate to all present the overwhelming might of the Nazi army, their devilish ferocity and power. He yearned to rouse these people, and would give the order to kill the boors at any provocation. Germans always looked down upon Belgians, believing they were *untermensch*, the lower peoples of Europe. This German captain, who had taken part in the invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries, had become a blood-thirsty beast. This summer would be the heyday of Nazi Germany, who now had the upper hand throughout all of Europe. After conquering many European countries, Hitler had deployed his top three A, B and C Corps, 136