

ZHANG JIE

LOVE MUST
NOT BE
FORGOTTEN

and Other Selected Writings



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS





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张 洁 著

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Preface

Literature may reflect the ethos of a country or a nation, while at the same time it can transcend the limits of time and space to most widely resonate a truly universal humanity. Literary works of art that move hearts may even inspire the compassion of strangers toward a people or country...

This "Panda Series" of books, expertly translated into English, compiles the works of well-known modern and contemporary Chinese authors around themes such as the city and the countryside, love and marriage, minority folk stories and historical legends. These works reflect the true spirit and everyday lives of the Chinese people, while widely resonating with their changing spiritual and social horizons.

Published from the 1980s, through more than 100 titles in English, this series continues to open wider the window for readers worldwide to better understand China through its new literature. Many familiar and fond readers await the latest in this "Panda Series." This publication of the "Panda Series" consolidates and looks back at earlier released literary works to draw new readers, while stirring the fond memories of old friends, to let more people share the experiences and views of the Chinese people in recent decades. We express our sincere appreciation to all authors, translators and editors who have engaged in their dedicated and meticulous work over the years to bring out these works. It is their passion and endeavor that have enabled this series to appear now in luminous distinction.

Foreword

“I once thought I was like a darting dragonfly, with no goals in life and no substantial pursuits. Only through literature did I discover myself. Successful or not, I am still very persevering . . . Some people spend a whole lifetime and still do not find or understand themselves. Others, of course, have a much easier time of it. For me, it took all of forty years.” So writes Zhang Jie in an essay about writing, an essay titled *My Boat**.

She was born in 1937. During the anti-Japanese war her parents separated and her mother, a teacher, brought her up in a village in Liaoning Province. She had a passion for music and literature, but was persuaded to study economics as being of more use to New China. Upon graduating from the People's University she worked for some years in an industrial bureau, then in a film studio where she got a chance to write two film scripts, *The Search* and *We Are Still Young*. She is now a full-time writer, one of China's most popular authors.

Zhang Jie did not start to write until after the fall of the “Gang of Four” and end of the Cultural Revolution. She was then forty years old. In 1978, her story *The Music of the Forests* won a prize as one of the best short stories of that year. Since then she has written many stories, essays, novellas and a novel, *Leaden Wings*, which recently won China's prestigious Mao Dun Literary Prize. She is a member of the Chi-

* See Biographical Note.

nese Writers' Association and now works for the Beijing branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. She has visited West Germany and some other European countries, and participated in the seminar of Chinese and American writers held in Beijing in October, 1984.

Her earlier themes were mainly the problems of youth and love. She had divorced her husband because he maltreated her, and in a society still influenced by traditional ideas that was considered a stigma. She thus bitterly experienced the discrimination against women about which she writes so pungently.

Zhang Jie's later themes cover a wide range. Whether writing satirically or in a romantic vein she tackles current social problems with deep insight, lashing out at male supremacy, hypocrisy, corruption, bureaucracy, nepotism and other malpractices holding up China's advance. Some Westerners on the look-out for dissidents find it strange that she exposes the seamy side of China so ruthlessly, yet defends the socialist system as that best suited to China. Zhang Jie herself sees no contradiction here. Her responsibility as a writer, she feels, is to educate her readers and inspire them to eradicate social evils. As she puts it in *The Ark*, writing of a woman her own age: "She possessed neither the unshakeable optimism of previous generations, nor the blind pessimism of the younger generation. Her generation was the most confident, the most clear-minded and the most able to face up to reality."

From her teens on Zhang Jie took part in many political movements. A firm believer in socialism, she joined the Chinese Communist Party at an early age. But during the Cultural Revolution she was fiercely criticized and had to write a self-criticism in which she cited her own weak sense of class struggle and her individualism. Colleagues attributed this "weakness" to the influence of the western novels she loved to read, novels of the 18th and 19th centuries. Now Zhang Jie recalls with some pride that she behaved decently in the Cultural Revolution, never betraying or slandering other people, because she loved the humanism in classical literature.

She finds it stimulating to be under fire. I have watched her several times being interviewed: she welcomes provocative questions and swiftly rebuts them or skillfully evades them.

Zhang Jie deserves credit as a pioneer who highlighted women's problems before authorities fully recognized them or took official action. As a consequence some of her stories have been most controversial. The first story in this collection, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, caused quite a furor when it was published in 1979. It justified love outside marriage, albeit of the most platonic kind, implying that the only moral marriages were those based on love. It also suggested that a girl should remain single unless she could find a man she loved and respected. Because of this, critics accused Zhang Jie of undermining social morality—most Chinese take it for granted that everyone must marry. She received anonymous letters attacking her. But she also received letters approving her stand and her courage.

The Ark proved no less controversial. This novella describes three women who are divorced or live apart from their husbands, and how hard it is for them to find suitable work and retain their self-respect in a male-dominated society. Some readers applauded Zhang Jie's fearlessness and acclaimed this as China's first feminist novel, though she denies that she is a feminist—she writes on all manner of themes. Certain detractors denounced her for encouraging women to let their resentment against men embitter them, so that they behave in an unwomanly way and are not really happy. Others claimed that she distorted socialism by painting too black a picture of women's difficulties. Yet others took an opposite line, objecting that most of the characters in this story were recognizable as living individuals. In this connection Zhang Jie wrote in *My Boat*: "Characters in literary works are perhaps composites of many people in real life, but they are still fictitious, something created by the author through logical reasoning."

The other stories in this collection gave rise to less public discussion than *The Ark* and *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*. All are sensitively written with feeling and insight. Their detailed

descriptions of everyday life and the thoughts and hopes of widely differing characters should shed light on Chinese reality for foreign readers. For although China has opened up for some years now, to many westerners the Chinese are still an inscrutable people. Zhang Jie presents them as credible human beings. During her recent visit to Europe she was reported on in all the main West German papers, and the title of one feature article was: "A Far-away Country Gradually Moves Nearer." This delighted Zhang Jie, who believes that most of the world's troubles arise from misunderstanding—from lack of communication—and modern Chinese writers are best fitted to introduce their country abroad.

Her important novel *Leaden Wings*, not included in this collection, has as its central theme the modernization of industry. The publication of this book aroused further controversy. Exposing various abuses and man-made obstacles to modernization, it came under fire for "attacking socialism." But many readers welcomed it as painting a truthful picture of modern Chinese society. Her fan mail included the assurance, "If ever you're in trouble, come to me."

Zhang Jie is physically frail, mentally tough. She has heart trouble and easily grows tired. One evening she called when we were having a party at which some young people were dancing. She exclaimed, "I can't stay, I might have a heart attack."

Another visit was equally typical. Zhang Jie appeared, the light of battle in her eye and a tape-recorder in her handbag. She had been confronting someone who had passed on to her the accusations that *Leaden Wings* was "anti-Party, anti-socialism." Taping the interview, Zhang Jie refuted these charges, declaring, "I wrote that book precisely because I'm for socialism and China's modernization." Then, on her way to our flat, she passed the free market outside our gate and felt it her duty as a Party member to intervene so as to stop a peddler from charging exorbitant prices.

Because Zhang Jie is thoroughly militant, with a strong sense of social responsibility, she will no doubt continue to tackle sensitive issues with disregard for her own welfare.

While affirming her complete faith in socialism she will go on exposing its present shortcomings, thus courting criticism from her more conservative readers. In *My Boat* she envisages herself putting out to sea and braving angry waves.

... I renovate my boat, patch it up and repaint it, so that it will last a little longer. I set sail again. People, houses, trees on shore become smaller and smaller and I am reluctant to leave them. But my boat cannot stay beached for ever. What use is a boat without the sea?

In the distance I see waves rolling towards me. Rolling continuously. I know that one day I will be smashed to bits by those waves, but this is the fate of all boats—what other sort of end could they meet?

Gladys Yang, Beijing, September, 1985

Contents

Love Must Not Be Forgotten	1
Emerald	17
The Time Is Not Yet Ripe	71
An Unfinished Record	87
Under the Hawthorn.....	101
Who Knows How to Live?	111
The Ark	125
Biographical Note: My Boat	223

Love Must Not Be Forgotten

I am thirty, the same age as our People's Republic. For a republic thirty is still young. But a girl of thirty is virtually on the shelf.

Actually, I have a bonafide suitor. Have you seen the Greek sculptor Myron's Discobolus? Qiao Lin is the image of that discus thrower. Even the padded clothes he wears in winter fail to hide his fine physique. Bronzed, with clear-cut features, a broad forehead and large eyes, his appearance alone attracts most girls to him.

But I can't make up my mind to marry him. I'm not clear what attracts me to him, or him to me. I know people are gossiping behind my back, "Who does she think she is, to be so choosy?" To them, I'm a nobody playing hard to get. They take offense at such preposterous behavior.

Of course, I shouldn't be captious. In a society where commercial production still exists, marriage like most other transactions is still a form of barter.

I have known Qiao Lin for nearly two years, yet still cannot fathom whether he keeps so quiet from aversion to talking or from having nothing to say. When, by way of a small intelligence test, I demand his opinion of this or that, he says "good" or "bad" like a child in kindergarten.

Once I asked, "Qiao Lin, why do you love me?" He thought the question over seriously for what seemed an age. I could

see from his normally smooth but now wrinkled forehead that the little grey cells in his handsome head were hard at work cogitating. I felt ashamed to have put him on the spot.

Finally he raised his clear childlike eyes to tell me, "Because you're good!"

Loneliness flooded my heart. "Thank you, Qiao Lin!" I couldn't help wondering, if we were to marry, whether we could discharge our duties to each other as husband and wife. Maybe, because law and morality would have bound us together. But how tragic simply to comply with law and morality! Was there no stronger bond to link us?

When such thoughts cross my mind I have the strange sensation that instead of being a girl contemplating marriage I am an elderly social scientist.

Perhaps I worry too much. We can live like most married couples, bringing up children together, strictly true to each other according to the law. . . . Although living in the seventies of the twentieth century, people still consider marriage the way they did millennia ago, as a means of continuing the race, a form of barter or a business transaction in which love and marriage can be separated. Since this is the common practice, why shouldn't we follow suit?

But I still can't make up my mind. As a child, I remember, I often cried all night for no rhyme or reason, unable to sleep and disturbing the whole household. My old nurse, a shrewd though uneducated woman, said an ill wind had blown through my ear. I think this judgment showed prescience, because I still have that old weakness. I upset myself over things which really present no problem, upsetting other people at the same time. One's nature is hard to change.

I think of my mother too. If she were alive, what would she say about my attitude to Qiao Lin and my uncertainty about marrying him? My thoughts constantly turn to her, not because she was such a strict mother that her ghost is still watching over me since her death. No, she was not just my mother but my closest friend. I loved her so much that the thought of her leaving me makes my heart ache.

She never lectured me, just told me quietly in her deep,

unwomanly voice about her successes and failures, so that I could learn from her experience. She had evidently not had many successes—her life was full of failures.

During her last days she followed me with her fine, expressive eyes, as if wondering how I would manage on my own and as if she had some important advice for me but hesitated to give it. She must have been worried by my naiveté and sloppy ways. She suddenly blurted out, "Shanshan, if you aren't sure what you want, don't rush into marriage—better live on your own!"

Other people might think this strange advice from a mother to her daughter, but to me it embodied her bitter experience. I don't think she underestimated me or my knowledge of life. She loved me and didn't want me to be unhappy.

"I don't want to marry, mother!" I said, not out of bashfulness or a show of coyness. I can't think why a girl should pretend to be coy. She had long since taught me about things not generally mentioned to girls.

"If you meet the right man, then marry him. Only if he's right for you!"

"I'm afraid no such man exists!"

"That's not true. But it's hard. The world is so vast, I'm afraid you may never meet him." Whether married or not was not what concerned her, but the quality of the marriage.

"Haven't you managed fine without a husband?"

"Who says so?"

"I think you've done fine."

"I had no choice. . . ." She broke off, lost in thought, her face wistful. Her wistful lined face reminded me of a withered flower I had pressed in a book.

"Why did you have no choice?"

"You ask too many questions," she parried, not ashamed to confide in me but afraid that I might reach the wrong conclusion. Besides, everyone treasures a secret to carry to the grave. Feeling a bit put out, I demanded bluntly, "Didn't you love my dad?"

"No, I never loved him."

"Did he love you?"

"No, he didn't."

"Then why get married?"

She paused, searching for the right words to explain this mystery, then answered bitterly, "When you're young you don't always know what you're looking for, what you need, and people may talk you into getting married. As you grow older and more experienced you find out your true needs. By then, though, you've done many foolish things for which you could kick yourself. You'd give anything to be able to make a fresh start and live more wisely. Those content with their lot will always be happy, they say, but I shall never enjoy that happiness." She added self-mockingly, "A wretched idealist, that's all I am."

Did I take after her? Did we both have genes which attracted ill winds?

"Why don't you marry again?"

"I'm afraid I'm still not sure what I really want." She was obviously unwilling to tell me the truth.

I cannot remember my father. He and Mother split up when I was very small. I just recall her telling me sheepishly that he was a fine handsome fellow. I could see she was ashamed of having judged by appearances and made a futile choice. She told me, "When I can't sleep at night, I force myself to sober up by recalling all those stupid blunders I made. Of course it's so distasteful that I often hide my face in the sheet for shame, as if there were eyes watching me in the dark. But distasteful as it is, I take some pleasure in this form of atonement."

I was really sorry that she hadn't remarried. She was such a fascinating character, if she'd married a man she loved, what a happy household ours would surely have been. Though not beautiful, she had the simple charm of an ink landscape. She was a fine writer too. Another author who knew her well used to say teasingly, "Just reading your works is enough to make anyone love you!"

She would retort, "If he knew that the object of his affection was a white-haired old crone, that would frighten him away." At her age, she must have known what she really wanted, so

this was obviously an evasion. I say this because she had quirks which puzzled me.

For instance, whenever she left Beijing on a trip, she always took with her one of the twenty-seven volumes of Chekov's stories published between 1950 and 1955. She also warned me, "Don't touch these books. If you want to read Chekov, read that set I bought you." There was no need to caution me. Having a set of my own why should I touch hers? Besides, she'd told me this over and over again. Still she was on her guard. She seemed bewitched by those books.

So we had two sets of Chekov's stories at home. Not just because we loved Chekov, but to parry other people like me who loved Chekov. Whenever anyone asked to borrow a volume, she would lend one of mine. Once, in her absence, a close friend took a volume from her set. When she found out she was frantic, and at once took a volume of mine to exchange for it.

Ever since I can remember, those books were on her bookcase. Although I admire Chekov as a great writer, I was puzzled by the way she never tired of reading him. Why, for over twenty years, had she had to read him every single day? Sometimes, when tired of writing, she poured herself a cup of strong tea and sat down in front of the bookcase, staring raptly at that set of books. If I went into her room then it flustered her, and she either spilt her tea or blushed like a girl discovered with her lover.

I wondered: Has she fallen in love with Chekov? She might have if he'd still been alive.

When her mind was wandering just before her death, her last words to me were: "That set . . ." She hadn't the strength to give it its complete title. But I knew what she meant. "And my diary . . . 'Love Must Not Be Forgotten.' . . . Cremate them with me."

I carried out her last instruction regarding the works of Chekov, but couldn't bring myself to destroy her diary. I thought, if it could be published, it would surely prove the most moving thing she had written. But naturally publication was out of the question.

At first I imagined the entries were raw material she had jotted down. They read neither like stories, essays, a diary or letters. But after reading the whole I formed a hazy impression, helped out by my imperfect memory. Thinking it over, I finally realized that this was no lifeless manuscript I was holding, but an anguished, loving heart. For over twenty years one man had occupied her heart, but he was not for her. She used these diaries as a substitute for him, a means of pouring out her feelings to him, day after day, year after year.

No wonder she had never considered any eligible proposals, had turned a deaf ear to idle talk whether well-meant or malicious. Her heart was already full, to the exclusion of anybody else. "No lake can compare with the ocean, no cloud with those on Mount Wu." Remembering those lines I often reflected sadly that few people in real life could love like this. No one would love me like this.

I learned that toward the end of the thirties, when this man was doing underground work for the Party in Shanghai, an old worker had given his life to cover him, leaving behind a helpless wife and daughter. Out of a sense of duty, of gratitude to the dead and deep class feeling, he had unhesitatingly married the daughter. When he saw the endless troubles of couples who had married for "love," he may have thought, "Thank Heaven, though I didn't marry for love, we get on well, able to help each other." For years, as man and wife they lived through hard times.

He must have been my mother's colleague. Had I ever met him? He couldn't have visited our home. Who was he?

In the spring of 1962, Mother took me to a concert. We went on foot, the theater being quite near. On the way a black limousine pulled up silently by the pavement. Out stepped an elderly man with white hair in a black serge tunic-suit. What a striking shock of white hair! Strict, scrupulous, distinguished, transparently honest—that was my impression of him. The cold glint of his flashing eyes reminded me of lightning or swordplay. Only ardent love for a woman really deserving his love could fill cold eyes like those with tenderness.