



Bing Xin

The Photograph

Panda



Books

The Photograph

Bing Xin

Translated by Jeff Book



Panda Books

Panda Books
First Edition 1992
Copyright 1992 by CHINESE LITERATURE PRESS
ISBN 7-5071-0084-7 / I . 78
ISBN 0-8351-2093-7

Published by CHINESE LITERATURE PRESS
Beijing 100037, China
Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation
35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China
P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China
Printed in the People's Republic of China

Panda Books
The Photograph

Bing Xin, originally named Xie Wanying, was born in Fuzhou, Fujian Province in 1900. She and her mother followed her father, an open-minded naval officer, to Shanghai, Yantai and Beijing, and in 1923 she was graduated from Beijing's Yenching University and won its prestigious Golden Key Award. In the autumn of the same year, she went to the famous women's college — Wellesley — in the United States to study English literature. She received her M. A. in 1926. After returning to China, she taught at Yenching University, Qinghua University and Beijing Women's College of Arts and Letters respectively. In the summer of 1936 she travelled to Japan, America, Britain, Italy, Germany and Russia. In September, 1938, she moved to Kunming and, two years later, to Chongqing. She returned to Beijing in the summer of 1946 and that winter left with her family for Japan, where she spent the next two years teaching modern Chinese literature. In 1951, two years after the People's Republic was established, she left Japan on the pretext of travelling to America on a lecture tour and returned to China.

In September, 1919, her first short story, "Two Families", was published under the pen name Bing Xin. This, together with a later story, "Loneliness", marked the beginning of her famous series of "issue

stories''. Her many subsequent works include *The Superman*, a collection of short stories; *Waters in Springtime* and *Stars*, two volumes of epigrammatic poems; and the *Complete Works of Bing Xin*. In 1982, the Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House published a series *Bing Xin's Works* grouped according to literary form.

Bing Xin has also translated and published, amongst others, Rabindranath Tagore's *The Gardener*, *Gitanjali* and *Selected Poems of Tagore*, and Mulk Raj Anand's *Fables of India*.

Her works have been translated into Japanese, English, German, French, Italian, Czech and Arabic.

CONTENTS

Foreword	17
Non- Fiction	
The Painting and the Poem	11
Notes From the Mountain	14
Returning South	43
The Story of a Little Bird	88
Common Folk	90
Soap Bubbles	95
My Childhood	99
Treasures Imperishable	107
Poetry	
Stars	117
Waters in Springtime	120
The Paper Boat	122
Lovesickness	123
I Was	124
The Sentence	125
After the Rain	126
Fiction	
The Superman	129
Year Away From Home	140
Loneliness	162
Sissy Liuyi	183
The First Dinner Party	194
Birth	209

Miss Dong 'er	224
The Photograph	234
Our Madam 's Parlour	260
My Landlady	292
West Wind	308
The Orange Peel Lamp	329
On a Train	334
My Most Unforgettable Experience	343
An Empty Nest	357
The Lowest Calling	369

Foreword

Chinese Literature Press' intention of publishing an English translation of my works rekindles my 70-year-long writing career. Looking back, I have indeed reaped more in the field of non-fiction than fiction. Therefore a few words of explanation as to the selection made in this volume are in order.

Sweet, sour, bitter and pungent are the four words that perhaps best describe what I have felt about my life.

During the period when I wrote "Stars", "Waters in Springtime", "The Superman" and "The First Dinner Party", my life was happy and joyous. Sweet was my heart.

Later, when I noticed that the world I was living in was actually divided into classes and that social environments could be repressive, I wrote "Birth" in sourness.

All through the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and the ten years of aberrant "cultural revolution", I only wrote "My Most Unforgettable Experience", a remembrance commemorating the late Premier Zhou Enlai. This was my bitter time.

After that I wrote the pungent "An Empty Nest" and "The Lowest Calling". It was a time when the country was calling on its young people to "look forward" while many of them only "looked at

fortune"! I have heard and seen so many of these "fortune-seekers" with different causes and aims that my pen has grown pungent.

Human beings are, above all, like a ginger: the older they grow the more pungent they taste.

Bing Xin

July 9, 1988

Non-Fiction

The Painting and the Poem

BECAUSE of sickness last winter, I had not been able to attend the Bible test, but as soon as I was better Ms An, the Bible teacher, asked me to make up the test I had missed.

It was a dismal day, and although it was not snowing, there was something oppressive and heavy about the weather. I trudged listlessly through the grey snow on campus and headed for my teacher's house. I had no more than mounted the first step of her home when my teacher, smiling warmly, came out to greet me. "Recovered?" she asked as she led me into her study. She sat down in a rocking chair, and I, resting one hand on the mantle, stood beside the fireplace. She opened a copy of the Bible, asked me a few brief questions about the Psalms, then wrote a few things down in her notebook. I looked up . . . and suddenly noticed a painting resting on the mantle.

It was a picture of a steep mountain cliff, covered with withered grass. On the edge of the cliff climbed a shepherd, his back facing the viewer. In the shepherd's right hand was a staff, and with his left hand he was reaching as far as he could to get a lamb, and the tips of his fingers were just touching the little sheep's head. Above, several birds of prey circled hungrily. The sky in the painting was just like the sky outside — dark and depressing.

The shepherd's clothes were covered with burs and thorns; he had climbed the rugged mountain in search of the lamb, the pitiful little lamb. It had gotten lost; below, a step away, was a jagged cliff, while overhead the large birds wheeled through the sky waiting anxiously. The lamb had no way out. But then the shepherd appeared! He had come not to reproach the lamb but to lovingly save it. Eyes that reflected misery, repentance, and joy looked up into the eyes of the shepherd. The lamb longed to be safe within the shepherd's reach yet dared not move.

I always have liked paintings, and I had encountered one or two in my life that had earned my rapt attention and admiration. To me, paintings existed to give me pleasure, to raise my appreciation of beauty and the fine arts. Good paintings always evoked from me words of praise and admiration and kindled a general feeling of happiness.

This painting, however, was entirely different. It did not speak, but suggested, challenged and comforted me. It defied comment; I could only stand there beside the fireplace in deep and reverent silence.

My eyes were riveted to the canvas, and as I stared at the scene before me, I was suddenly overwhelmed with unfathomable emotion. Tears welled up in my eyes, though I could not explain why. Mere passing excitement? Faith? Comfort? How could I express my feelings? The painting would not allow me to try....

Just then Ms An called my name, and I turned around. My eyes went directly to the Bible that was resting on her lap, and several lines — from the Psalms — jumped out at me:

‘The Lord is my Shepherd.... He restoreth my

soul — ”

My teacher turned a page. Again a passage leapt from the book: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. . . . There is no speech or spoken word. . . . Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, their sayings to the end of the earth! ”

This all occurred quite a while ago, and whatever else happened on that day has long since been obscured in the fog of time. But the power of those poems and the message of that painting — these things I shall never, never forget. . . .

September 6, 1920

Notes From the Mountain

— To my little friends so far away

THE doctor says I am here to recover; I insist it is simply to rest. Whatever the case, I have spent over half a year under strict regulations concerning my activities. There is something romantic about it all, actually. These six months have been filled with experiences that children would find both scary and funny. Most adults would not appreciate them, but that matters little. If an adult read this, he would probably just turn up his nose in disgust and throw these pages away. But if some boy or girl picks it up and reads it, if he or she finds these stories amusing enough to pass on to a friend or retell to others, then that will make me most happy! I have really been bored for the last couple days. A lot of things in this world do not make sense. For example, this morning when I went out for a walk, the sun was so hot that I could hardly stand it. Now, just before noon, the sky is overcast and the wind is gusting hard enough to bowl me over. So I am sitting on the porch writing down a few random thoughts; what else is there to do?

June 23, 1924

I. My Cowardly Soul

When I was a little girl, I was like most children, afraid of many things. Adults often teased me. I had an uncle who liked to read me stories from *Chats in a Dark Room*, *True Records of What Happens at Night*, and other tales with all sorts of goblins and corpses and that sort of thing. Whenever Uncle would tell these stories, I would always shake in fear and keep looking behind me. I made sure I was seated in the middle of several adults; I wanted nothing to sneak up on me. After I went to bed, I would stare at the curtains expecting at any moment to see a white, ghostly hand reach from behind them. When I could stand it no more, I would duck under the covers and pull them over my head so tightly that I could hardly breathe. It got so hot under there that by morning I was wringing wet with sweat!

Around age thirteen I changed. I was quite simply afraid of nothing. I could walk through a graveyard at night with the wind rustling the leaves and grass, and turn around and stare at any strange noise. I could stand in the dark and spooky temples with those ferocious looking idols towering above me on either side and not flinch. Mother often told me that I was a brave girl; she said that when she was that age, she was still afraid of most everything.

Nothing could bother me during the day; why fear some silly ghoul you can't even see, I thought. But lately in my dreams or in that fuzzy world that we enter just before falling asleep or waking up, I have been surrounded by a horde of the monstrous faces that I feared so long ago. I am too scared to call out, I lie in bed

with my body paralyzed in fear, and my frightened soul squirms within me. I struggle to come fully awake and when I do, I look out the window at the pine-covered mountains and moon-lit skies. All nature seems to smile and tell me that everything is alright. I have not had nightmares like this for over ten years, and they make me sad! Sad because they remind me of my childhood and of how vivid, how interesting every experience is to the young heart. There is even something lovable about those frightful dreams!

II. Buried and Unearthed

Nobody cares what you do when you live on a mountain. Other than making sure you get three meals a day and your body temperature checked you are free to do whatever you want. The doctors and nurses don't care. Under such circumstances, my childish heart beats again. The hobbies and habits of my early years resurface, and I am a child once more.

America is not my country and Sharon is not my home. I have spent the last six months here due to an illness, and once I leave I probably will never return. I would forever regret it if I did not leave behind here a memento or two, something to show for my short stay in this place, so every day I bury something that will possibly be unearthed later.

When I was little, this is what I really loved to do: Take my little boats made out of cuttlefish spines or the little paper men or anything else that I played with, and bury them. I would write things on leaves and bury them. I would carve some characters on a stone and heave it into the water. Some time later, when I thought