

"All the more powerful for the simplicity of the prose."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

RED SCARF GIRL

A MEMOIR OF THE
★ CULTURAL REVOLUTION ★



JI-LI JIANG

Foreword by David Henry Hwang



THE LIBERATION ARMY DANCER

Chairman Mao, our beloved leader, smiled down at us from his place above the blackboard. The sounds and smells of the tantalizing May afternoon drifted in through the window. The sweet breeze carried the scent of new leaves and tender young grass and rippled the paper slogan below Chairman Mao's picture: STUDY HARD AND ADVANCE EVERY DAY. In the corner behind me the breeze also rustled the papers hanging from the Students' Garden, a beautifully decorated piece of cardboard that displayed exemplary work. One of them was my latest perfect math test.

We were having music class, but we couldn't keep our minds on the teacher's directions. We were all confused by the two-part harmony of the Young Pioneers' Anthem. "We are Young Pioneers, successors to Communism. Our red scarves flutter on our chests," we sang over and over, trying to get the timing right. The old black pump organ wheezed and squeaked as

impatiently as we did. We made another start, but Wang Da-yong burst out a beat early, and the whole class broke into laughter.

Just then Principal Long appeared at the door. She walked in, looking less serious than usual, and behind her was a stranger, a beautiful young woman dressed in the People's Liberation Army uniform. A Liberation Army soldier! She was slim and stood straight as a reed. Her eyes sparkled, and her long braids, tied with red ribbons, swung at her waist. There was not a sound in the classroom as all forty of us stared at her in awe.

Principal Long told us to stand up. The woman soldier smiled but did not speak. She walked up and down the aisles, looking at us one by one. When she finished, she spoke quietly with Principal Long. "Tong Chao and Jiang Ji-li," Principal Long announced. "Come with us to the gym." A murmur rose behind us as we left the room. Tong Chao looked at me and I looked at him in wonder as we followed the swinging braids.

The gym was empty.

"I want to see how flexible you are. Let me lift your leg," the Liberation Army woman said in her gentle voice. She raised my right leg over my head in front of me. "Very good! Now I'll support you. Lean over backward as far as you can." That was easy. I bent backward until I

could grab my ankles like an acrobat. "That's great!" she said, and her braids swung with excitement.

"This is Jiang Ji-li." Principal Long leaned forward proudly. "She's been studying martial arts since the second grade. She was on the Municipal Children's Martial Arts Team. Their demonstration was even filmed."

The Liberation Army woman smiled sweetly. "That was very good. Now you may go back to your classroom." She patted me on my head before she turned back to test Tong Chao.

I went back to class, but I could not remember the song we were singing. What did the Liberation Army woman want? Could she want to choose me for something? It was too much to contemplate. I hardly moved when the bell rang to end school. Someone told me that the principal wanted to see me. I walked slowly down the hall, surrounded by my shouting and jostling classmates, seeing only the beautiful soldier, feeling only the electric tingle of her soft touch on my head.

The office door was heavy. I pushed it open cautiously. Some students from the other sixth-grade classes were there already. I recognized Wang Qi, a girl in class two, and one of the boys, You Xiao-fan of class four. I didn't

"Absorbing. Jiang views devastating developments with the wide-eyed innocence of youth."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

In 1966, twelve-year-old Ji-li Jiang had everything: brains, the admiration of her classmates, and a bright future in Communist China. But that year China's leader, Mao Zedong, launched the Cultural Revolution, and Ji-li's world began to fall apart.

Over the next few years, her family was humiliated by former friends and neighbors. They lived in constant terror of arrest, and when her father was finally detained, Ji-li faced the most difficult dilemma of her life.

This is the true story of one family's courage and determination during one of the most terrifying eras of the twentieth century.

"Transcends politics and becomes the story of one little girl trying to survive the madness."

—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)

"Heart-pounding. A page-turner. Excellent."

—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

***Publishers Weekly* Best Book**

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