

**LEAVE  
ME ALONE**  
A NOVEL OF CHENGDU  
**MURONG**

Translated by  
Harvey Thomlinson

  
ALLEN & UNWIN

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Allen & Unwin  
83 Alexander Street  
Crows Nest NSW 2065  
Australia  
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100  
Fax: (61 2) 9906 2218  
Email: [info@allenandunwin.com](mailto:info@allenandunwin.com)  
Web: [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com)

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## CHAPTER ONE



My wife, Zhao Yue, called as I was leaving. She wanted to try this new hotpot restaurant in Xiyan district.

‘Your whole life is about food,’ I said. ‘Like a pig’s.’

I was in a foul temper because my colleague Fatty Dong had just been promoted to general manager of the Sichuan branch office. Fatty started at our company at the same time as me. His only talent was groveling, but I was going to be under his thumb from now on and felt depressed.

My wife said, ‘If you won’t come, then I’ll go with someone else.’

‘Screw someone else if you like.’

I’d barely got that out when Zhao Yue ended the call abruptly.

I stood in front of the phone in my office. I realised

my wife hadn't done anything wrong. Still, I wasn't in the mood to restrain myself. Grabbing my briefcase, I left the building.



In March the dust and smoke of Chengdu<sup>1</sup> gets everywhere. I bought a pack of cigarettes at a street stand and wondered where I could go to pass the rest of this Friday night. After much thought, I decided to seek out Li Liang.

Li Liang was a university friend. The second year after graduation he'd quit his safe job working for a state company and started a completely new career trading futures. In less than two years he'd made a fortune of 2 or 3 million yuan. Thinking about it, I admitted that sometimes you had to believe in fate. At college no one could have foreseen Li Liang would have a talent for investing: he'd been little more than my sidekick.

My guess was that right now if he wasn't asleep he was playing mahjong. This was his favourite—sometimes his only—recreation. One time at college, I found him after thirty-seven hours of non-stop gambling during which he lost all his money and meal vouchers, and he said: Chen Zhong, lend me ten yuan so I can get some food. The story went that he collapsed later in a small restaurant outside the campus gates.

When I showed up at Li Liang's there were three others at the table—two guys and a girl. I didn't know any of them. On seeing me, Li Liang said, 'Jerk, there's beer in the fridge, DVDs in the dining room and a rubber doll on

the dresser in the bedroom. It's never been used. Choose your pleasure!

The others laughed.

'Screw you!' I said.

I put some money down on the table and said, 'What are the stakes?'

The girl sitting opposite Li Liang told me double or quits. Checking my wallet, I found more than 1000 yuan, which I guessed should cover it.

Li Liang introduced his guests. The two guys were from out of town. They were here to learn about Li Liang's futures trading. The young woman was Ye Mei and apparently she was the daughter of the boss of the blah blah construction company. I opened a can of beer and went over to check out her tiles. Ye Mei was wearing a red sweater and a pair of tight jeans. She had full breasts and a very fine slim waist, and was jiggling her long slender legs. I felt stirrings below my waist and gulped down some beer to calm things.

After a few rounds, Li Liang got up to adjust his hi-fi speakers and invited me to play in his place. I immediately got mugged by Ye Mei's suite and lost 200 yuan. My luck continued to slide and a few rounds later the 1000 yuan was all gone. I hit on Li Liang for some more money. He cursed and lobbed his wallet at me. At that point my mobile rang. It was Zhao Yue.

'What are you doing?' she said.

'Playing mahjong.'

'Having fun, huh?' She sounded hostile.

I said it was OK, at the same time throwing out a tile.

‘When are you coming home?’ she asked.

‘I might play all night, so you needn’t bother waiting up for me.’

She hung up without another word.

After Zhao Yue’s call, my luck turned. I kept winning and winning big. The two guys taunted me that such good luck in gambling meant I was due for some bad luck in my private life. They joked that I should watch out my wife wasn’t having an affair. Smiling, I just went on stuffing their cash into my pockets.

At 3 am, when I had cleaned up for the fourth time, Ye Mei stood and said, ‘No more! There’s something wrong with this game. I’ve never seen such disgusting good luck.’

I took an inventory of my winnings and saw that I’d not only got back the lost 1000, I had an extra 3700—that was more than half my basic monthly salary. On a high, I refilled glasses for Ye Mei and myself, then leapt up on the sofa and gave an impromptu recital of one of Li Liang’s poems: *Life comes all of a sudden, fuck it!*

We’d started a literature society at university—I was the president, he wrote the poetry. It was the perfect front to bed many female literature fans. As Bighead Wang from our university dormitory once said: Both your hands are stained with virgins’ blood.

Still, the situation at work was really getting me down. I wanted to sleep but knew that I wouldn’t be able to, and

I'd wake up Zhao Yue if I went home. She'd ask where I'd been and we'd quarrel. The neighbours were tired of our midnight fights, sick of the sound of smashing plates. But if I didn't go home there was nowhere to go.

I said, 'Li Liang, let's hit the road! Big brother's gonna take you for some drinks, and we'll see this babe home.'

Li Liang tossed me his car keys, and said he wasn't coming. He asked me to drive the two guys to their hotel and escort Ye Mei home. As we were leaving he warned: 'Ye Mei, take care around him, he's not a good guy. His nickname is Flower-Destroying Monk.'

Ye Mei laughed and asked if she could borrow a knife or pair of scissors.

Li Liang said, No need. If he tries anything, just kick him in the balls.



It was dead quiet at midnight. As we passed the Qing Yang Palace, I suddenly remembered the first time Zhao Yue and I went there. With our eyes closed we played a game of reaching out to touch the blood-red 'longevity' character on the wall. It turned out I was touching the 'pie' stroke and she was touching the 'dot'.

I said, You can enjoy your longevity since you got the 'cock'.<sup>2</sup>

Zhao Yue had laughed her head off. Right now she would be sleeping, and I imagined her cuddling a pillow, snoring, with the light on. Coming home after a business trip once, I'd found her just like that.

Ye Mei lit up a cigarette and said, 'Are you thinking about your mistress now? You have an evil smile.'

I said, 'Yeah, I'm thinking of you. When we get those two brothers back to the hotel, you come home with me, OK?'

'Unfortunately, I couldn't take your wife's slapping.'

I smiled, and thought nastily that it was OK as long as she could take me.

I've never been able to resist sexual temptation. Li Liang even wrote a poem about me:

*Tonight the sunlight is bright and beautiful  
Dancing with hormones  
Chengdu, your soft skin  
Is like my sad mood  
Walking naked in God's smile  
I had nothing to choose at Yanshikou in March*

*Nothing to choose* actually meant *unwilling to choose*. Li Liang had laid into me once, saying I wouldn't let even a pig get away. To make his point he checked off my girlfriends on his fingers:

- That PE teacher with bad skin.
- The 150-kilo restaurant boss.
- The waitress who was ugly enough to frighten you.
- And that fried breadstick sales girl who ate garlic.

I responded that he simply didn't appreciate women. For example:

- The PE teacher was tall, 177 centimetres, and her nickname was 'dark rose'.
- The restaurant boss was as plump as the famous Imperial concubine Yang.<sup>3</sup>
- That waitress was hot. Her chest size was 36F, so she looked as if she was going to topple over when walking. If she did, her breasts would hit the ground before her face did.
- And don't you think my breadstick lover looked like that hottie Ning Dongdong in our class?

Li Liang just muttered, Dude, you're not picky at all.

After dropping off the two guys, Ye Mei and I were alone. I drove slowly, staring at her until she started to seem uncomfortable. Her face gradually reddened. When I smirked, she lost it.

'What's so funny?'

I asked if she was a virgin or not.

She glared. "Too bad I didn't borrow that knife from Li Liang so I could chop it off."

In my experience, if a girl was willing to banter with you in this way it meant she didn't mind being seduced. Also, I'd read somewhere that women's resistance was at its weakest after midnight. Stopping the car with the excuse of adjusting the angle of the rearview mirror, I pressed

against her. She trembled slightly but didn't move away, and so I slid my arm around her slender waist.

She protested. 'You are bad. If you try that again, I'll have to get out of the car.'

I sighed and reluctantly withdrew my arm.

Then she murmured, 'Who gave you the right to win all my money anyway?'

Hearing this I was overjoyed and held her tight.