

# YOU JIN

Winner of the  
**CULTURAL  
MEDALLION**

**MUM  
IS  
WHERE  
THE  
HEART  
IS**



TRANSLATED BY SHELLY BRYANT

Mum Is Where The Heart Is

# YOU JIN

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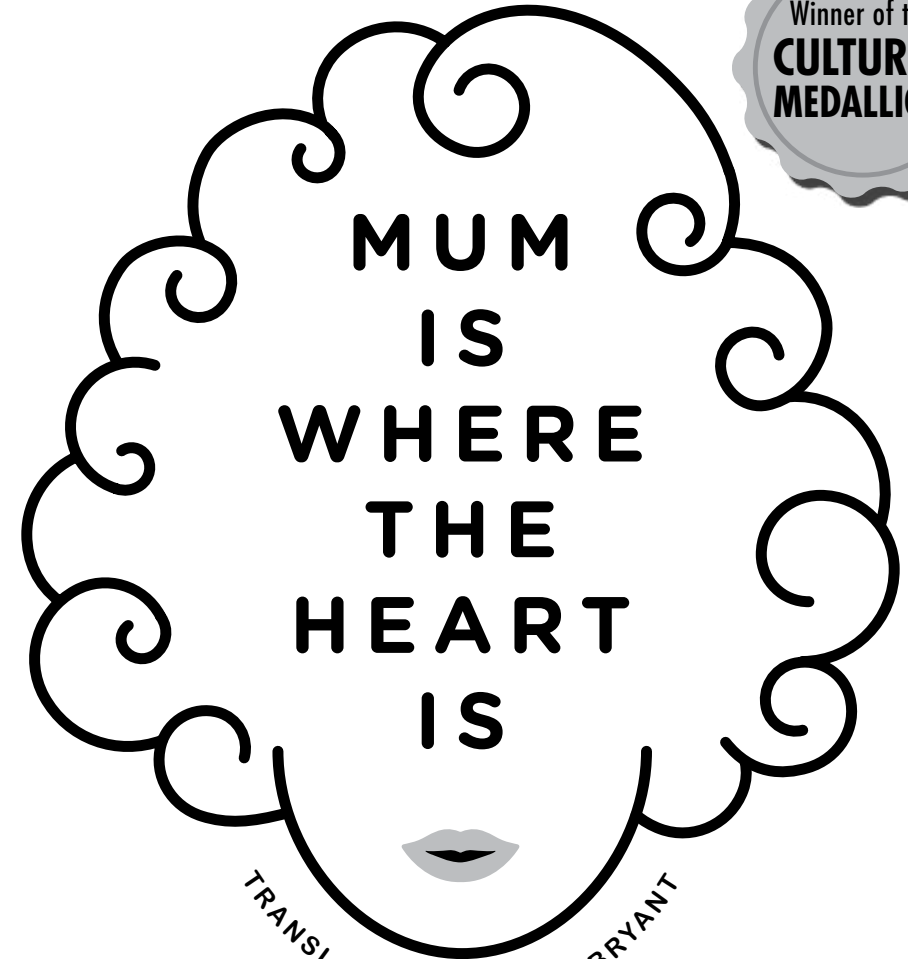
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TRANSLATED BY SHELLY BRYANT



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## CHAPTER 1

## An Unexpected Guest

## The Rambutan Tree

AN OLD, FAITHFUL tree stood at the main entrance to our grand ancestral home in Ipoh, with flaming red rambutans weighing its branches down. This tree was my mother-in-law's most loved object. She loved it for its craziness. It did not distinguish between year, month or season, always producing fruit in a frenzy. Clusters of rambutan forced the thin branches to bow, the crimson colour of the husks so bright it was almost gaudy, as if staining the fat clouds red in delight.

It was not only the outside of the rambutan that looked good. When the red hairy skin was opened to reveal the glistening flesh, each bite was a burst of joyous sweetness.

This fruit's outstanding quantity and quality were the result of my mother-in-law's tireless efforts. She protected the tree from insects, and fertilised and watered every day without fail. It rewarded her tender ministrations with a wealth of delicious fruit.

The first time I saw the tree was early in the year I turned twenty-six, and had just married into the Lim family. At the time, my mother-in-law already had ten grandchildren. At Chinese New Year, the whole clan returned to Ipoh from where they were scattered

across the world, and the normally quiet ancestral home would overflow with uproarious laughter. In the 1970s, we did not have computers, and even television programmes were not very good, so the family garden served as the children's playground. The rambutan tree with its rich leafy branches naturally became their headquarters. All the children, brimming with energy, would turn into Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, soaring into the tree and leaping about among its branches, the deep greens and vivid reds of the foliage casting bright patterns against the background of their figures.

My mother-in-law and I sat on chairs under the tree, chatting. A calm smile lit her almond-shaped eyes. Amid the happy shouts of the children, she said, "When you have children, send them to Ipoh and let me look after them." She paused, then added, "I'll teach them to climb trees."

Children! To me, becoming a parent was still a vague, distant thought. I was only twenty-six, and had just made a switch in my career from a professional librarian to a news reporter. My life had changed from a boring white sheet to a multi-coloured fabric in leopard print. I still had much that I both needed and wanted to learn.

But then, looking at the innocent, adorable children playing in the branches above us, I thought: Raising a child is just like cultivating a tree. Only a person who loves her tree wholeheartedly, tending it with all her strength and giving it all her attention, will ever see it grow up strong. While it grows, she should not smother it with too much protection. Let the wind blow and the rain fall, and it will be trained over time to be tough and fearless.

One day, I thought, if I have children, I want them to be like

trees, possessing a sturdy body like the trunk, and a brain like the rich, abundant fruit. When the wind comes, I will let it rustle through the leaves, making them dance, and when the rain arrives, I will allow its waters to soak in and bring new brightness to its leaves. I did not want a little potted plant so weak it had to be kept indoors, sheltered from the wind. Whatever else I ended up with, I certainly did *not* want that.

### Caught Unawares

I remember very clearly the morning in September 1976, when I arrived at a Chinese pastry shop in Jurong to conduct an interview for a special story I was writing. Chinese pastry-making is a trade with a long history in Singapore, starting from when a group of hardworking pioneers made their way here from China, bringing with them their skills in pastry-making. In the past, these sorts of pastries were often given away at weddings and almost always used as an offering made to the spirits, so their ancient flavour had a sort of mystical appeal. But by the 1970s, Singaporean society had become more Westernised, and social customs and tastes had changed. This, along with the constant rise in prices of ingredients and difficulty in finding workers, put the entire Chinese pastry industry into dire straits. It was because of this that I had decided to conduct an investigation into the prospects of the industry.

More than thirty types of pastries with different shapes were sold in the Jurong shop, overwhelming my senses with their beautiful colours and aromas.

As was my usual practice, I had not eaten breakfast before

rushing out of the house to conduct the interview. However, the delicious smells of warm pastry did not stimulate the wriggly worm of hunger in me; instead, my belly felt like it was suddenly filled with too much air, like a balloon. The innocent pastries had unwittingly attacked my senses, and I had an unusual response—I felt like vomiting.

I thought that maybe my gastric problems were flaring up again; they had troubled me continually since becoming a reporter. As soon as I had finished the interview, I rushed to a clinic on Holland Road. The doctor broke out into a huge smile and said, “Congratulations!”

There was an unexpected guest in my belly. I was due to deliver my first baby the following June.

I stepped out of the clinic, my mind in a whirl. The previous week, my husband James and I had been excitedly planning a trip around the world. We had decided to apply for three months’ leave from our companies and travel to the four corners of the Earth. To make possible this lovely plan, I had spent every non-working moment like a little worm, burrowing deeply into history and geography books; our huge world map was all worn out from my constant poring over it. I felt that reading a million books for the sake of travelling a million miles was really a thing of beauty.

But the news of my pregnancy poured cold water over the whole plan.

Conventional wisdom dictated that I should have been elated to receive news that I was going to be a mother. But the timing... When I stepped out of the clinic, I felt an unusual weight, as if I had been put in shackles. I never anticipated that I might feel this way after receiving news that my firstborn was on the way.

Cancelling the plans for our round-the-world trip, I continued with my reporting career. I scrambled for interviews as I awaited the arrival of the new life. I say “waiting”, not “looking forward”, because throughout the period of my pregnancy, I had all the most miserable symptoms.

Vomiting, dizziness, nausea. I felt like I was floating in a haze. On many occasions, when I was halfway through an interview, I had to ask the interviewee for a break so I could run to the washroom, where I would throw up until my stomach was a knot. It seemed more accurate to call my “bundle of joy” a “burden of woe”.

At the same time, my emotions were as volatile as a land mine. I exploded at the slightest cause, sometimes even without any provocation. One day, it was late when I finished an exclusive interview on the dying laundry industry, so it was already after eight when I got home. My legs were so tired, I felt like they would snap if I just bent them lightly. But even worse off than my legs was my spirit. James had got home earlier than me, and had already set out dinner on the table. There was a steamed fish, an onion omelette, a pot of cabbage, and white radish soup. At one glance, I started complaining: the fish was smelly, the eggs fishy, the soup plain, and my spirits low. James, however, was in a good mood, filling up bowls with steaming rice, and urging me, “Let’s eat!”

I picked up my bowl of rice and reluctantly scooped the grains into my mouth with my chopsticks. James placed a huge piece of snowy white fish meat into my bowl. Without quite knowing why, I completely lost my temper, sweeping the fish from my bowl onto the table with a plop. Huge tears welled up and dropped into my bowl. James did not say a word, but calmly picked up the fish from the table and moved it aside. Then, he looked at me gently and said,

“You’re going to give birth to a firecracker!” Getting no response from me, he continued, “A torpedo giving birth to a firecracker. Before long, the house will be filled with the smell of gunpowder!”

My tears were still streaming down my cheeks, but his funny comment made me feel more like laughing. After a moment, he added in a serious tone, “Laughter is the best nutrition for the foetus. It seems like it’s been a long time since the baby had this nourishment.”

These words jolted me. Why had it not crossed my mind that the baby needed happiness as a foundation for health?

In the days that followed, I learned to control my temper, and the uncomfortable symptoms of pregnancy gradually disappeared. I was no longer dizzy, and I stopped vomiting. But just as I started to feel better, a new “ailment” surfaced: my belly became a bottomless pit. No matter how much food I put into it, it was never enough. Even if a slice of air could have been chopped up and served to me, I would have devoured it like it was the tastiest dish ever. I ate everything I could get my hands on, all day every day. There was no point trying to control myself because no matter how much I ate, my belly was still just as big and round. If I refrained, it would be in vain, so I ate greedily and heartily. If there was such thing as an Eating Olympics, I would have won a gold medal.

I ate well and slept well, and I was healthy. Sometimes as I was zipping about doing my work, I could even forget that I was pregnant.

One day, when I was seven months along, the Asian Women’s Welfare Association organised a press conference, during which they announced some experimental plans to open a day care centre in the Ang Mo Kio Community Nursing Home. The press conference was scheduled for ten in the morning, so at nine I was on the roadside waiting for a taxi. After waiting for quite a while, I still had not

seen even the shadow of a cab. I am a very time-conscious person, and my anxiety transformed into ants crawling on my skin. A bus arrived, with passengers already packed as tightly as sardines in a tin. Without regard for anything else, I pushed my way onto the bus, squeezing into the swollen crowd, and perched precariously on the steps like an acrobat. All I was thinking about at that moment was work-work-work, with no regard for danger. My foolish decision almost resulted in a disaster: the bus had only been on the road for a short while when the driver slammed on the brakes. I fell down the stairs and into the road on my back. Amid alarmed cries from the crowd, wave after wave of pain flowed very distinctly from my ankle. I was not afraid that I was injured, but that the baby might have been hurt. Kind bystanders rushed to help me up, and a thoughtful driver stopped and rushed me to the hospital.

Fortunately, nothing was wrong with the foetus, but I was given two weeks of medical leave for my injuries. During the fortnight I lay in bed, I started to consider seriously the question of who would look after the child after it was born. Did I want to employ a domestic helper? James and I both worked very long hours. Who was going to look after the baby? Did I want to entrust my child to a nanny? The problem was, I had not yet found someone I could trust.

It seemed that the only viable option for us at the time was to send the baby five hundred kilometres away to Ipoh and allow my mother-in-law to care for it. She lived a leisurely life, and she loved—in fact, yearned—to care for her grandchildren. If I sent the baby to her, I could have complete confidence in its welfare, and she would be totally overjoyed. This seemed like a win for both sides.



## An Unexpected Reaction

My due date was 11 June 1977. I worked furiously right up until 8 June, then took maternity leave from work.

Being used to a hectic work schedule, I now turned my attention to the kitchen. I cooked all sorts of tonics for myself, most often with braised black chicken. I cooked the dish in a very special way: first, I skinned and quartered the chicken, then used a mortar and pestle to pound it. I then placed a bowl upside down in a double-layer stewpot, put the bashed chicken on top of the inverted bowl, and braised it on low heat for four hours. The heat drew the juices out of the chicken, turning it golden brown. As I savoured each bite, it was like I was eating a ray of sunshine, warming me through and through. It was very comforting and beneficial.

James would take me out to dinner at different restaurants to sample different cuisines. I ate until I was stuffed, my face bright and my belly full. But while I was enjoying the finest food in life, the baby still refused to make its debut.

The obstetrician who cared for me was Dr Lena Chen. I was ten days overdue and she suggested exercise.

“Exercise!” I cried. Normally, hearing that word was like hearing the name of my foe. Here I was lugging around a belly as huge as a barrel, and she wanted me to exercise?

Dr Chen kindly offered to enrol me into an antenatal exercise class at the hospital. I shook my head like a rattle. She compromised, saying, “Then go walk in the garden. The more you exercise, the easier the birth process will be.”

At the time, we were staying in a low-density block near Newton Circus, on the top floor of a four-storey building. That day when

I went home, I used the stairs to initiate my exercise programme. Three times a day—after breakfast, lunch and dinner—I climbed up and down the stairs. As I did so, sweat dripped down my back and my breath was as heavy as an ox’s, but my belly was unmoved by my efforts.

On 28 June, when I went for my next check-up, Dr Chen finally announced, “Get ready to go to the hospital tomorrow morning. I’m going to induce labour.”

On 29 June, I checked into Mount Alvernia Hospital. Five hours after I received an injection to induce labour, my eldest child was born. We named him Lim Fung Yee. Before James’s father had passed away, he left a list of names. The “Fung” that makes up the middle character of my son’s name was set by the family genealogy, and the final character was an expression of his grandfather’s explicit wish that the next generation be of good character and temperament.

When I held this seven-pound baby at my breast, my first thought was, *I really should not have drunk so much coffee while I was pregnant*. The little face was so dark, that it felt quite distant and unfamiliar to me, not at all what I had expected to see or feel when I first held my first child.

But even though the face first struck me as something less than beautiful, before long a flood of affection, with a mixture of great pleasure and pride, washed over me.

I was a mother!

I paused, then smiled to myself. I had no idea in that moment what a long road lay ahead of me in the future. I certainly did not expect all the unavoidable difficulties of raising a child.

## Confinement

In 1977, I was working as a reporter for the *Nanyang Siang Pau*. My monthly salary was only \$700, but a confinement nanny cost \$800 for the month, and an additional \$50 ang pow was expected on top of that. The confinement nanny is a specialised profession in Singapore and Malaysia. During a newborn's first month, she comes in to look after both mother and child; her duties include doing the laundry and cooking herbal tonics and foods carefully tailored to a new mother's needs. Her most important responsibility is to take care of all the baby, including feeding and bathing it.

I had met Auntie Zhang, the confinement nanny we'd chosen, only once before I gave birth. She was in her fifties and wore her hair pulled back, revealing a forehead with faint lines. She had sparkling, gold teeth, and appeared capable and sharp. I liked what I saw, and promptly paid a \$400 deposit for her services. I never imagined that the person I saw then was just a false front.

When I returned home from the hospital, Auntie Zhang was already busy in the kitchen. The sour smell of black vinegar greeted me, and I felt very happy. It was commonly believed then that black vinegar was good for recuperation after giving birth. I was always fond of vinegar-soaked braised pig's trotters, so I was quite pleased to think that I would spend the next month enjoying such delicacies.

Auntie Zhang walked out of the aromatic kitchen, but did not reach out to take the baby I carried in my arms, as I had hoped. She said, "The crib is set up. Let the baby sleep there." Her tone was commanding, and without a hint of emotion.

I hesitated. But before I could respond, she added, "I've already arranged the nappies. If you need one, you can take it from the

cupboard." And with that, she went back into the kitchen.

I was tired. After settling the baby in, I lay down on the bed. Just as I started to doze off, I heard the baby cry. The shrill sound chased away the sleep and I got up to check on him. He was crying so hard that his little face was wrinkled up like a walnut, his two little legs trembling. Why was he crying? Was he hungry? Or was he sick? I felt puzzled and helpless, so I called repeatedly, "Auntie Zhang!" I had to shout several times before I heard her reply from the kitchen: "Can't you see I'm busy?"

She didn't even walk out of the kitchen to have a look. Was I really stuck with the wrong person?

In the afternoon, after I had eaten the pig's trotters she had prepared for me, I again started to feel sleepy. I dozed off, but this time it was the sound of the television that woke me. I walked out of the room, still in a stupor. The scene before me scared all the grogginess out of me. Auntie Zhang was sitting on the sofa watching television, her legs splayed and the baby asleep on her lap. The volume of the television was turned up very loud, and...she sat there smoking!

Furious, I shouted, "Auntie Zhang, how can you smoke with the baby right there?"

She looked up at me, puckered her lips as if trying to suppress a smile, and said, "This is your first child, so it's no surprise you're anxious. Let me tell you, I've been a confinement nanny for more than twenty years. I have lost count of how many children I've raised, but I've never heard of a single child in any of those households suffering any ill effects from my smoking."

I was young then, and when I heard this, I did not dare to show my displeasure or reprimand someone twice my age. Furthermore, I thought about how she would be the one sleeping in the baby's room

at night—if I made her unhappy, who knew what she might do?

Swallowing my anger, I carried the baby back to my own room, feeling discouraged. Everyone had told me that, if I hired a confinement nanny, I could have a taste of the comfortable life of an empress, so why did this first day feel as long as a year?

But in my time of misery, a guardian angel appeared. Anxious to see her grandson, my mother-in-law rushed down to Singapore on the train from Ipoh. At nine that night, James picked her up at the train station and brought her home. As soon as she stepped into the house, she picked up the baby and hugged him tightly to her, face crinkled up in a huge smile. That sort of unspeakable love seemed to flow like a steady stream from the deepest part of her heart.

Aunty Zhang sat to one side, her whole face as cold and hard as bread left out overnight on an ice tray. She must have thought she would be the “big boss” in the house during that month and having the final say in everything, not expecting a roadblock before she had even really got started. Now her unhappiness was written all over her face.

That night when the baby cried, Aunty Zhang prepared a bottle for him. While the baby was drinking, she smoked a cigarette, and ash fell onto the infant’s face. My mother-in-law happened to get up around that time and saw this frightening scene; she gave the nanny a solid scolding, then snatched the baby up and carried him into her room to look after him.

Early the next morning, this confinement nanny, all puffed up with misplaced pride for being a “veteran”, knocked on my door angrily. “I quit!” she announced.

Although I did not show it, I was actually quite pleased. Afraid she would change her mind, I quickly gave her an ang pow and sent

her home. I was willing to forgo the four hundred dollar deposit in order to see the back of her. You could say that hiring a full-time domestic helper proved an unpleasant experience for us this time, like being bitten by a snake. But, as the saying goes: “Once bitten, twice shy”. This experience served as a good lesson for the rest of my life.

### Letting Go

When my mother-in-law arrived from Ipoh, she had brought two surprises for me. One was a dozen chickens ready to cook, and the other was a huge packet of Chinese medicine.

Each chicken weighed about one kilo, with yellow skin and tender meat, all cleaned and sealed into plastic bags. My mother-in-law busied herself putting them into the freezer as she told me, “I raised all these chickens myself. When I first got them, they were fuzzy things, smaller than the palm of my hand. I took care of them, fed them and raised them to this size. When you eat these chickens, they will be especially effective for your recuperation.”

My mother-in-law’s cooking skills made for great variety in my diet—ginseng chicken, steamed red date chicken, stir-fried sesame chicken, ginger wine stewed chicken, pig livers and pork belly.

My favourite was pig’s trotters braised in vinegar. There were numerous ingredients in the dark, scrumptious dish—pork legs, ginger, black beans, brown sugar and dark vinegar. Oddly, no matter who might cook these same ingredients together, no one else has been able to achieve the flavour of my mother-in-law’s dish. The plump round trotters were soft and broke easily into smaller pieces. The

supple, creamy texture of the pig skin was light and moist, producing a multitude of flavours. The black vinegar was bright enough to serve as a mirror, with not a drop of oil in evidence, pleasant to the eyes and comforting to drink. The taste of the vinegar could only be described as excellent; it was very sour, very sweet, a little spicy and a little salty, transporting you to another world with each bite.

The secret of the unique way my mother-in-law cooked the vinegar pig's trotters was how she handled the ginger. Most people wash the ginger, then drop it straight into the vinegar to cook. My mother-in-law believed this method would infuse the ginger too quickly into the vinegar and ruin the balance, so she always simmered a kilogramme of ginger in sesame oil over a low fire. She fried it over and over again, stirring and turning it often. She fried it until the ginger was dried out, then dropped the sesame oil seasoned root into the vinegar. In this way, the vinegar and ginger infusion would have an especially tasty ginger flavour.

Aside from her skills at cooking a restorative diet, my mother-in-law was a firm believer in another sort of therapy—herbal baths. Most people say that a woman should not bathe during confinement, nor should she wash her hair, but my mother-in-law did not believe this. She brought a large pack of Chinese medicine with her, which she cooked until steam filled the house, gradually releasing the odours. Once the concoction had turned black as ink, she put out the fire and carefully ladled it into the bathtub. She repeated the process until the tub filled completely.

As she ran back and forth between the kitchen and washroom, she explained, "This remedy was brought over from Hainan. Boiling these herbs for the bathwater will help get rid of the bad aftereffects of giving birth, and protect and heal the body."

During my confinement period, I felt refreshed, spending my time every day reclining on the bed reading, never knowing what it meant to be tired. I thought that this must be the effect of the herbal bath. My only regret was that I never asked my mother-in-law for the combination of herbs used, so when others asked me about it, my mind was a total blank.

(Here I might offer a word of advice for those who have secret recipes handed down to them: grasp the opportunity to learn these recipes. When our relatives are healthy, we often naïvely think it will last forever, and so take things for granted. But the truth is that we never know when the worst might happen, and all that received knowledge will be lost.)

My mother-in-law's careful attentions were the embodiment of the word *love*. Given the constant mother- and daughter-in-law-conflicts of modern society, the way she treated me like her own daughter is something that I will forever be grateful for.

During this time, I read numerous books. My reading material had nothing to do with parenting or children, but was all travel writing.

At this point, I had already decided that when my baby reached his first month, I would send him to Ipoh to be looked after by my mother-in-law. As for me, I planned to travel around Australia for a month with James. James already had permanent residence there, and he had long wished for me to see the place he had called home for seven years before we were married.

On 29 July 1977, Fung Yee celebrated his first month. On the surface, there is not much difference in the behaviour of a one-month-old baby and a newborn. Aside from drinking milk, soiling diapers, crying and smiling, the baby did not do much. But the truth is, in leaving the mother's womb for this strange world, he had

already experienced and survived a very turbulent time, so the first month was a big milestone worth celebrating.

Early that morning, my mother-in-law took a brand new pair of scissors and cut all his hair off, leaving him bald. According to our tradition, this represented giving him a fresh new start at his first month. Also, it is believed that shaving the head bald allows the new hair to grow back softer, thicker and shinier.

After his haircut, Fung Yee seemed energetic, his eyes darting around to observe the world around him. We adults bustled about enthusiastically, dyeing eggs red, scooping steaming glutinous rice into exquisite containers, and sticking auspicious, festive red papers onto the boxes of cakes we had chosen carefully.

Everyone was smiling. That sort of heartfelt happiness transformed into solid laughter, a strand here and a strand there, like stalactites in a cave, tangible and abundant.

After we finished the one-month celebration, my mother-in-law took my little Fung Yee back to Ipoh. I packed my bags too, and flew to Australia. My friends thought I was crazy. They all said, "Your baby just celebrated his first month. How can you stand to let him go and then head off travelling?"

What they said raised a very significant point: *letting go*. It's true, I did let go. All my life, I have tried to let go, which is a philosophy of life that looks easy, but is actually very difficult. Only if we truly know how to let go will we not forget ourselves when we succeed, nor go crazy when we fail. If we know how to let go, we will not indulge in our colourful success, or in losing ourselves on the way. In the same manner, we will not be overly hurt by the thorns of failure, sacrificing our dignity and goals.

We must always move forward. We will achieve many things and

lose many things. When it is time to let go, we must let go. Then, we move forward and let go again.

I was letting go of my newborn son and throwing myself fully into the joy of travelling. Some parents leave their young children with the grandparents and travel, but as soon as they leave the country, they miss the child, and so spend the whole holiday calling home to ask about her or him. They worry so much that they cannot enjoy anything. Some blame themselves all the time, and even regret the trip. But I never once regretted my decision. I knew that, in my mother-in-law's hands, my child would grow, inch by inch, in great happiness. So, without a single worry, I travelled to Australia and thoroughly enjoyed our holiday.

Seven years later, in 1984, I went to Australia again after my daughter celebrated her first month. But that trip was stained with agonising tears, and I nearly lost my life.

However, that is a story for a later time.

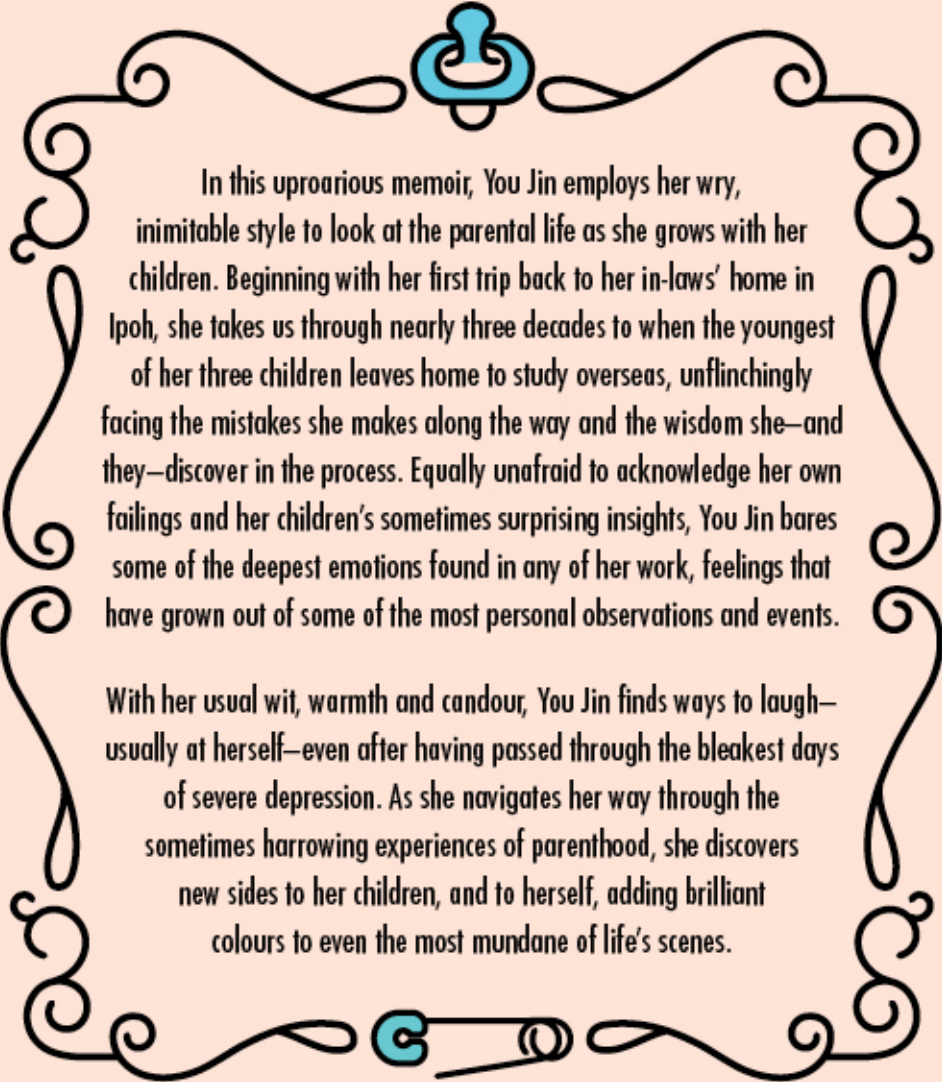


## About the Author

YOU JIN has published more than 150 books in Chinese in Singapore, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia. These include novels, short story collections, travelogues and essays. She is the first recipient of both the Singapore Chinese Literary Award and the Montblanc-NUS Centre for the Arts Literary Award. She received the Zhong Shan Literary Award in 2010 and Singapore's Cultural Medallion in 2009.

## About the Translator

SHELLY BRYANT divides her time between Shanghai and Singapore, working as a poet, writer, and translator. She is the author of seven volumes of poetry, a pair of travel guides for the cities of Suzhou and Shanghai, and a book on classical Chinese gardens. Shelly's poetry has appeared in journals, magazines and websites around the world, as well as in several art exhibitions. Her translation of Sheng Keyi's *Northern Girls* was longlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2012.



In this uproarious memoir, You Jin employs her wry, inimitable style to look at the parental life as she grows with her children. Beginning with her first trip back to her in-laws' home in Ipoh, she takes us through nearly three decades to when the youngest of her three children leaves home to study overseas, unflinchingly facing the mistakes she makes along the way and the wisdom she—and they—discover in the process. Equally unafraid to acknowledge her own failings and her children's sometimes surprising insights, You Jin bares some of the deepest emotions found in any of her work, feelings that have grown out of some of the most personal observations and events.

With her usual wit, warmth and candour, You Jin finds ways to laugh—usually at herself—even after having passed through the bleakest days of severe depression. As she navigates her way through the sometimes harrowing experiences of parenthood, she discovers new sides to her children, and to herself, adding brilliant colours to even the most mundane of life's scenes.

You Jin has published more than 150 books in Chinese in Singapore, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia. These include novels, short story collections, travelogues and essays. She is the first recipient of both the Singapore Chinese Literary Award and the Montblanc-NUS Centre for the Arts Literary Award. She received the Zhong Shan Literary Award in 2010 and Singapore's Cultural Medallion in 2009.

Shelly Bryant is the translator of Chew Kok Chang's *Other Cities, Other Lives*, published by Epigram Books, and Sheng Keyi's *Northern Girls*, which was published by Penguin Books and longlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize. She is also the author of four volumes of poetry and two travel guides on Suzhou and Shanghai.

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