



## The Dog

*Jack Livingstone*

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Set in the shifting landscape of contemporary China, Jack Livings's *The Dog* explodes the country's cultural and social fault lines, revealing a nation accustomed to rations, bitter struggle, and the stranglehold of communism as it confronts a generation rife with the promise of unforeseen prosperity.

In this riveting, richly imagined collection, a wealthy factory owner—once a rural peasant—refuses to help the victims of an earthquake until his daughter starts a relief effort of her own; a marginalized but powerful Uyghur gangster clashes with his homosexual grandson; and a dogged journalist is forced to resign as young writers in "pink Izod golf shirts and knockoff Italian loafers" write his stories out from under him. With spare, penetrating prose, Livings gives shape to the anonymous faces in the crowd and illuminates the tensions, ironies, and possibilities of life in modern China. As heartbreakingly hopeful as it is hopeful, *The Dog* marks the debut of a startling and wildly imaginative new voice in fiction.

## The Dog Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (first published April 2005)

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Author : Jack Livings

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## From Reader Review The Dog for online ebook

### **Brian Goeselt says**

Jack Livings "The Dog Stories" left me in awe. I wanted to know how this guy knew so much about China and the Chinese? I wanted to know how much of the material in these stories was actually true. And I wanted to know where I could get more! These short, intense vignettes stare openly at the most compelling and sometimes painful contradictions and growing pains of an emerging and increasingly emerged China. If you find China interesting, read this book. You will not be sorry you did.

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### **Trish says**

This book of stories has received much critical praise. Livings seems to have some of the real grit of China embedded in his stories and seems to have caught the wildly blunt, even cruel, language of the Chinese countryside and the off-kilter reasoning of city residents. But somehow Livings' work left me with the disturbed feeling I get when I read Mo Yan. I appreciate their skill but don't like their writing.

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### **Cheryl Wadhwa says**

I loved immersing myself in this book with characters that were relatable, where I felt like I could empathize with them and have an emotional connection to them, all while enjoying the writing tremendously. Not knowing much about China or its culture, I appreciated learning more about it in a way that didn't seem distant as I might have been anticipating. The stories give us glimpses into different aspects of Chinese life and what certain circumstances might be like. And the writing really is wonderful. I wished there had been eight more stories and I can't wait to see more from this author!

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### **Jeff says**

This book was very well reviewed and appeared on many " lists " but, I must say, I do not see it. That is not to say a couple of the stories are not interesting, they are, perhaps the buzz was just too much for the product. Stories of note include " The Crystal Sarcophagus " which tells of the work involved and the incredible sacrifice of the artisans involved in completing the resting place for Chairman Mao. " An Event at Horizon Trading Company " is an almost farcical look at a stock office during the economic downturn of the last decade while " Donate " blisters the government tactics of pressure for voluntary donations from both businesses and individuals after a crippling earthquake. For me the best story might well have been one of the simpler ones, " Switchback, 1994 " tells of an accident on an isolated mountain road that leaves a schoolteacher dead, his bicycle crumpled under an industrial truck.

Just in writing of these four stories I realize that the collection does have merit, if anything it was just over promoted, it is good, it is interesting in places, it is not award worthy.

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## **karen says**

also we are best friends now

PAY ATTENTION!!!

this is one of the finest short story collections i have ever read.

there are only eight stories total, but what they lack in quantity they more than make up for by being delivered in this consistently perfect, strong voice detailing the frequently frustrating struggles of the citizens of modern china and their conflicts between collective and personal will and the sacrifice of private desires to the necessary public facade.

in *the crystal sarcophagus*, which is the longest piece in the collection, there is a nearly absurdist tone as workers who are commissioned to build a crystal coffin for chairman mao come up against insurmountable obstacles:

*The vice mayor continued. Casting and fabrication teams would be housed at the 505. The Academy of the Arts would prepare an array of designs, and Office Nine would select the most suitable. "Ten months," he said again.*

*Zhou Yuqing, ever earnest, perhaps the only one by temperament unafraid of Li Quan, spoke up. "Comrade Vice Mayor, I mean no disrespect, but this task will be very difficult to complete in fewer than three years." There were some noises of assent in the room. What he'd mean by very difficult was impossible. They'd all done the math in their heads.*

*The annealing process could not be rushed. Crystal pulled too soon from the cooling furnace would have the tensile strength of rock salt. And for slabs of the size required by Task One, proper annealing would take at least three years.*

*Li Quan spoke over the tops of their heads, addressing the back wall. "When completion of a task requires conditions that do not exist, create proper conditions!" He punctuated the words by slapping his palm onto the desk. Professor Emeritus Hong Li jumped in his chair.*

*"Comrade Vice Mayor," Zhou said, "we're just humble workers, and we can't defeat physical laws. There will be serious difficulties building the coffin if we don't have at least three years."*

*"You must be prepared to overcome all difficulties with an indomitable will and in a planned way!" Li Quan said. "No delays."*

*Zhou Yuqing resigned his challenge. Vice Mayor Li was powerful, and could have had him labeled a reactionary element and locked up. But more importantly, there was no sense in arguing with the Party. The Party outranked physical laws, scientific fact, logic. This knowledge was as essential to those in the room as the marrow in their bones. The Party was their water, their food, their thoughts.*

it would be funny if it weren't also so heartbreaking in its dogged futility

*In this manner Comrade Zhou Yuqing was made secretary of the team. His reluctance to accept the post was more than a standard show of deference. There was one thing of which he was certain: Task One was destined to fail. The impossibility of success was lost on no one, yet there was no doubt they would attack blindly, with full red hearts, like a cavalry riding directly into enemy cannons. Zhou would head the charge, and he would be the first to fall.*

each story is perfectly encapsulated, and ends firmly, without any of that wishy-washy trailing off that some short stories like to pass off as an ending. if i hadn't already been converted over to the cult of the short story, this collection would have done it for me.

here is a link where you can read the titular story for yourself:

<http://www.theparisreview.org/fiction...>

and look who else liked it!

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/31/book-reviews/reviews-of-the-week-a-red-china-fantasy-and-a-new-memoir.html>

come to my blog!

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### **Ken says**

These short stories are all set in Red China, which is interesting esp. in the early stories, but begins to sag as a novelty in the middle ones. It was a long march through the one about Chairman Mao's sarcophagus. The last two stories, humorous and peppy, picked up the tempo a bit. Bookended with strength, like many collections, then.

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### **Sarah says**

Finally, a short story collection that I absolutely loved! I thought this day would never come. Living is amazingly gifted at creating little nuggets of storytelling that pull the reader right in from the get go. Whole little worlds created in sentences, characters with complete backstories woven deftly into their short stint on the main stage. An intricate pie of different slices of Chinese life.

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### **Marybeth says**

Read this kind of distracted at the pool. Quality conversation behind me that I had to listen into. Guy and girl discussing how he wasn't that into this girl. The girl asked him, 'did you like it?' His reply, 'yes I'm a guy.'

'But, I'm not going to date her.' My faith in humanity and China has been restored via a public pool, a can of up and up sunscreen, and a bikini. Pretty good little book but some of the stories got kind of boring. I liked the one where the wealthy factory owner got in trouble for donating money directly to the Red Cross for earth quake victims versus going through the government where they would get a 10 percent cut. The story of building the coffin could have been cut by 10 to 15 pages, too technical.

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### **Maciek says**

Jack Living's *The Dog* is a collection of eight stories set in contemporary China. Although the author is not Chinese, he has lived in China for some time as an exchange student and English teacher - but does this small window in time give him a real insight into the minds of the Chinese and the nature of their country?

An author who does this splendidly is Robert Olen Butler, whose *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* is a collection of stories narrated by and about Vietnamese, living in Vietnam and abroad. Butler spent time in Vietnam during the war as a translator, having plenty of time and opportunity to interact with ordinary people - which shows in his stories: his narrators speak for themselves, with each having a unique voice to tell a different story about their experience. For these stories, Butler has been awarded the Pulitzer - and rightly so; these are touching stories of people who had to spread all across the world because of a terrible war that was brought upon them.

Unfortunately *The Dog* pales in comparison. Although the collection has been well received by professional reviewers, who praised it as a window into contemporary China, I could never shake off the feeling that I was reading stories about the Chinese written by someone who was not Chinese, but tried to write from a "Chinese perspective". I couldn't connect with the characters as I did in Robert Olen Butler's stories, and found none of the stories to be particularly insightful, or moving. The one story of note that I would select would be *The Crystal Sarcophagus* - which is centered around the impossible effort of building an appropriate grave for the recently departed Chairman Mao. Still, it feels and is an artificial construct - with non-real characters engaged in an absurd situation for its sake.

However, this one story is not enough for me to truly recommend the entire collection/ I approached it wanting to experience stories about China, but couldn't shake off the impression that I was reading a second-hand experience of China. And with Chinese authors being translated into English and other languages, this is simply not good enough. Better luck next time, laowai!

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### **Tina says**

This collection of short stories focused on post-Mao communist China failed to really grab me. Most of the stories are very bleak and either involve cynical, irredeemable characters or no real characterization at all. This is the type of writing that I feel critics and the literary types love, but I personally have no taste for. I just don't like reading about a sort of vague malaise, there is so much of that type of thing out there it seems. The one story I did like was "The Crystal Sarcophagus." This was still overall a somber tale, but it featured some more likable characters who also had depth to their backstory. Not my favorite short story collection by any means.

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### **Roxane says**

I just didn't connect to these stories. Not the book for me.

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### **Frances says**

Short story collection set in post-Mao China. The first story, The Dog, hits hard, causing me to pause before reading the rest, which I then did almost straight through. Curious to know where the ideas came for each of these stories...

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### **John Krafft says**

I lived in Beijing for five years in the 80's and speak Mandarin. This book of short stories captures contemporary China better than anything else I have read. The stories are varied, poignant and beautifully written.

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### **Glenna says**

I was especially impressed by "The Crystal Sarcophagus" and "Switchback 1994". I thought at first "Jack Livings" was a pseudonym since I didn't see how a foreigner could "know" so many characters and places. I lived and taught in China in the 80's and have returned several times since. A few stories were difficult to approach and read but all reflected aspects of modern China.

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### **Joanne says**

This is the first book of China that I have read and not liked. The stories were all bleak and rather unattached. It seemed like a hodgepodge rather than a collection.

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