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Under the Red Flag

Ha Jin

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The twelve stories in *Under the Red Flag* take place during China's Cultural Revolution. Ha Jin, who was raised in China and emigrated to the United States after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, writes about loss and moral deterioration with the keen sense of a survivor. His stories examine life in the bleak rural town of Dismount Fort, where the men and women are full of passion and certainty but blinded by their limited vision as they grapple with honor and shame, manhood and death, infidelity and repression.

In "A Man-to-Be," a militiaman engaged to be married participates in a gang rape, but finds himself impotent when he looks into the eyes of the victim. His fiancee's family breaks off the engagement, not because of the rape, but because they doubt his virility. In "Winds and Clouds over a Funeral," a Communist leader disobeys his mother's last wish for burial to keep his good standing in the party, but his enemies bring him down for being a bad son. "In Broad Daylight" is the story of the public humiliation of a woman accused of being a whore. Her dignified defiance is gradually stripped away as she is dragged through the streets, cursed and spat upon by strangers and family alike.

In *Under the Red Flag*, privacy is nonexistent and paranoia rules as neighbor turns against neighbor, husband turns against wife, state turns against individual, history turns against humanity. These stories display the earnestness and grandeur of human folly, and in a larger sense, form a moral history of a time and a place.

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