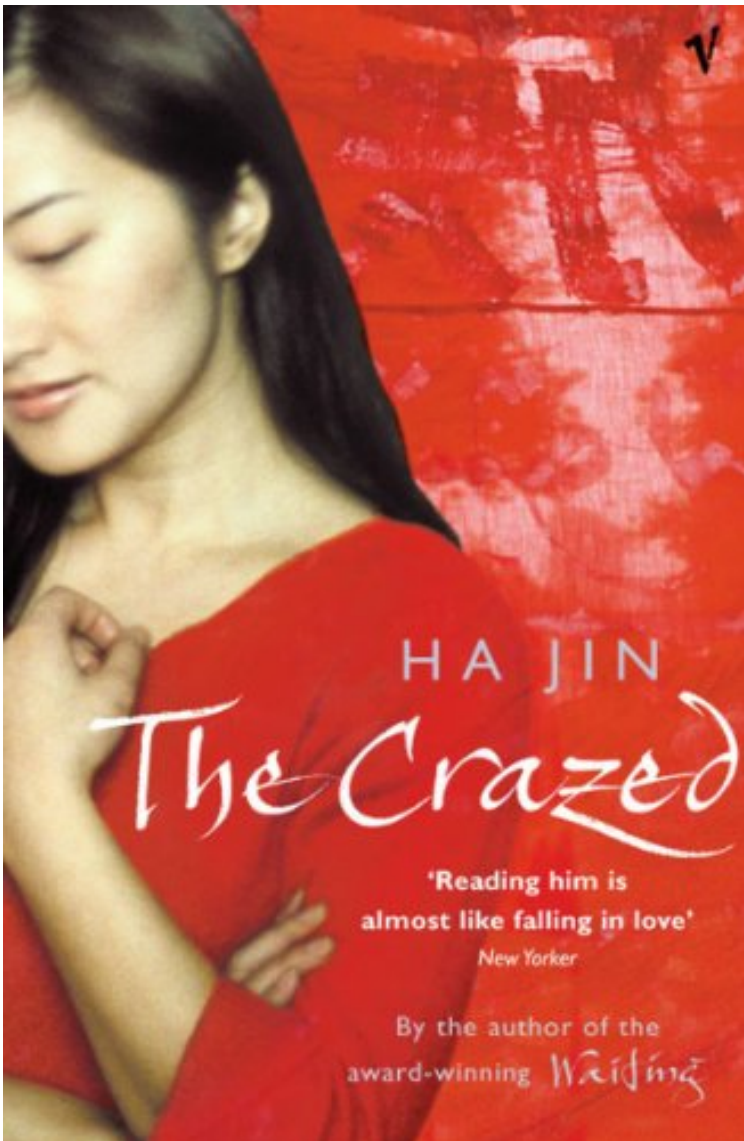


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The Crazy



Par Ha Jin
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Par Ha Jin : The Crazy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Crazy:

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Description : Description du produit Since the appearance of his first book of stories in English, Ha Jin has won the National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award, and garnered comparisons to Dickens, Balzac, and Isaac Babel. Like Babel, wrote Francine Prose in The New York Times Book Review, Ha Jin observes everything . . . yet he tells the reader only and precisely as much as is needed to make his deceptively simple fiction resonate on many levels. In his luminous new novel, the author of *Waiting* deepens his portrait of contemporary Chinese society while exploring the perennial conflicts between convention and individualism, integrity and pragmatism, loyalty and betrayal. Professor Yang, a respected teacher of literature at a provincial university, has had a stroke, and his student Jian Wan who is also engaged to Yang's daughter has been assigned to care for him. What at first seems a simple if burdensome duty becomes treacherous when the professor begins to rave: pleading with invisible tormentors, denouncing his family, his colleagues, and a system in which a scholar is just a piece of meat on a cutting board. Are these just

manifestations of illness, or is Yang spewing up the truth? And can the dutiful Jian avoid being irretrievably compromised? For in a China convulsed by the Tiananmen uprising, those who hear the truth are as much at risk as those who speak it. At once nuanced and fierce, earthy and humane, *The Crazy* is further evidence of Ha Jin's prodigious narrative gifts.

Presentation de l'auteur Professor Yang, a respected teacher of literature, has had a stroke and it falls to Jian Wan - who is also engaged to Yang's daughter - to care for him. It initially seems a simple duty until the professor begins to rave, pleading with invisible tormentors and denouncing his family...Are these just manifestations of illness, or is Yang spewing up the truth? In a China convulsed by the Tiananmen uprising, those who listen to the truth are as much at risk as those who speak it. Lyrical and heart-breaking, *The Crazy* is an incisive portrait of modern Chinese society..com Set during the Tiananmen Square uprising of 1989, *The Crazy*, a novel from Ha Jin, the award-winning author of the bestseller *Waiting*, unites a prominent Chinese university professor who suffers a brain injury and Jien Wen, a favorite student and future son-in-law who becomes his caretaker. As Professor Yang rants about his earlier life, his bizarre outbursts begin to strike Jien as containing some truth and, considering the uncertain times, he puzzles over their meaning. When Jien realizes that his additional responsibilities make sitting for his Ph.D. exams impossible, Meimei, his fiance, promptly discards him, branding him as unloving, since passing the exams would have ensured they would both have attended graduate school in Beijing. Unmoored from the university, and unconnected to anything else, Jien joins the student movement and as a result becomes a police suspect. Problematic to the plot is that Meimei is hardly warm to Jien; their relationship never appears to be anything but doomed. The professor's hallucinatory diatribes comprise the bulk of the novel, and initially it seems unlikely that a story will ever evolve from these ramblings. But with Yang indisposed, minor characters from the university conspire to devise means to further their personal agendas. A mystery results, as university and literature department personnel plot to have someone other than Jien marry Meimei. Jin's prose is succinct, but the most interesting parts of Jien's life occur, unfortunately, at the end of the book, leaving readers who fell for *Waiting* wanting more. --Michael Ferch Extrait1 Everybody was surprised when Professor Yang suffered a stroke in the spring of 1989. He had always been in good health, and his colleagues used to envy his energy and productiveness--he had published more than any of them and had been a mainstay of the Literature Department, directing its M.A. program, editing a biannual journal, and teaching a full load. Now even the undergraduates were talking about his collapse, and some of them would have gone to the hospital if Secretary Peng had not announced that Mr. Yang, under intensive care, was in no condition to see visitors. His stroke unsettled me, because I was engaged to his daughter, Meimei, and under his guidance I had been studying for the Ph.D. entrance exams for the classical literature program at Beijing University. I hoped to enroll there so that I could join my fiance in the capital, where we planned to build our nest. Mr. Yang's hospitalization disrupted my work, and for a whole week I hadn't sat down to my books, having to go see him every day. I was anxious--without thorough preparation I couldn't possibly do well in the exams. Just now, Ying Peng, the Party secretary of our department, had called me to her office. On her desk an electric fan was whirring back and forth to blow out the odor of dichlorvos sprayed in the room to kill fleas. Her gray bangs were fluttering as she described to me my job, which was to attend my teacher in the afternoons from now on. Besides me, my fellow graduate student Banping Fang would look after Mr. Yang too; he was to take care of the mornings. "Well, Jian Wan," Ying Peng said to me with a tight smile, "you're the only family Professor Yang has here. It's time for you to help him. The hospital can't provide him with nursing care during the day, so we have to send some people there." She lifted her tall teacup and took a gulp. Like a man, she drank black tea and smoked cheap cigarettes. "Do you think he'll stay in the hospital for long?" I asked her. "I've no idea." "How long should I look after him?" "Till we find somebody to replace you." By "somebody" she meant a person the department might hire as a nurse's aide. Although annoyed by the way she assigned me the job, I said nothing. To some extent I was glad for the assignment, without which I would in any case go to the hospital every day. After lunch, when my two roommates, Mantao and Huran, were napping, I went to the bicycle shed located between two long dormitory houses. Unlike the female students, who had recently all moved into the new dorm building inside the university, most of the male students still lived in the one-story houses near the front entrance to the campus. I pulled out my Phoenix bicycle and set off for Central Hospital. The hospital was in downtown Shanning, and it took me more than twenty minutes to get there. Though it wasn't summer yet, the air was sweltering, filled with the smell of burning fat and stewed radish. On the balconies of the apartment

buildings along the street, lines of laundry were flapping languidly--sheets, blouses, pajamas, towels, tank tops, sweat suits. As I passed by a construction site, a loudspeaker mounted on a telephone pole was broadcasting a soccer game; the commentator sounded sleepy despite the intermittent surges of shouts from the fans. All the workers at the site were resting inside the building caged by bamboo scaffolding. The skeletonlike cranes and the drumlike mixers were motionless. Three shovels stood on a huge pile of sand, beyond which a large yellow board displayed the giant words in red paint: AIM HIGH, GO ALL OUT. I felt the back of my shirt dampen with sweat. Mrs. Yang had gone to Tibet on a veterinary team for a year. Our department had written to her about her husband's stroke, but she wouldn't be able to come home immediately. Tibet was too far away. She'd have to switch buses and trains constantly--it would take her more than a week to return. In my letter to my fiance, Meimei, who was in Beijing cramming for the exams for a medical graduate program, I described her father's condition and assured her that I would take good care of him and that she mustn't be worried too much. I told her not to rush back since there was no magic cure for a stroke. To be honest, I felt obligated to attend my teacher. Even without my engagement to his daughter, I'd have done it willingly, just out of gratitude and respect. For almost two years he had taught me individually, discussing classical poetry and poetics with me almost every Saturday afternoon, selecting books for me to read, directing my master's thesis, and correcting my papers for publication. He was the best teacher I'd ever had, knowledgeable about the field of poetics and devoted to his students. Some of my fellow graduate students felt uncomfortable having him as their adviser. "He's too demanding," they would say. But I enjoyed working with him. I didn't even mind some of them calling me Mr. Yang, Jr.; in a way, I was his disciple. Mr. Yang was sleeping as I stepped into the sickroom. He was shorn of the IV apparatus affixed to him in intensive care. The room was a makeshift place, quite large for one bed, but dusky and rather damp. Its square window looked south onto a mountain of anthracite in the backyard of the hospital. Beyond the coal pile, a pair of concrete smokestacks spewed whitish fumes and a few aspen crowns swayed indolently. The backyard suggested a factory--more exactly, a power plant; even the air here looked grayish.

By contrast, the front yard resembled a garden or a park, planted with holly bushes, drooping willows, sycamores, and flowers, including roses, azaleas, geraniums, and fringed irises. There was even an oval pond, built of bricks and rocks, abounding in fantailed goldfish. White-robed doctors and nurses strolled through the flowers and trees as if they had nothing urgent to do. Shabby as Mr. Yang's room was, having it was a rare privilege; few patients could have a sickroom solely to themselves. If my father, who was a carpenter on a tree farm in the Northeast, had a stroke, he would be lucky if they gave him a bed in a room shared by a dozen people. Actually Mr. Yang had lain unconscious in a place like that for three days before he was moved here. With infinite pull, Secretary Peng had succeeded in convincing the hospital officials that

Mr. Yang was an eminent scholar (though he wasn't a full professor yet) whom our country planned to protect as a national treasure, so they ought to give him a private room. Mr. Yang stirred a little and opened his mouth, which had become flabby since the stroke. He looked a few years older than the previous month; a network of wrinkles had grown into his face. His gray hair was unkempt and a bit shiny, revealing his whitish scalp. Eyes shut, he went on licking his upper lip and murmured something I couldn't quite hear. Sitting on a large wicker chair close to the door, I was about to take out a book from my shoulder bag when Mr. Yang opened his eyes and looked around vacantly. I followed his gaze and noticed that the wallpaper had almost lost its original pink. His eyes, cloudy with a web of reddish veins, moved toward the center of the low ceiling, stopped for a moment at the lightbulb held by a frayed wire, then fell on the stack of Japanese vocabulary cards on my lap. "Help me sit up, Jian," he said softly. I went over, lifted his shoulders, and put behind him two pillows stuffed with fluffy cotton so that he could sit comfortably. "Do you feel better today?" I asked. "No, I don't." He kept his head low, a tuft of hair standing up on his crown while a muscle in his right cheek twitched. For a minute or so we sat silently. I wasn't sure if I should talk more; Dr. Wu had told us to keep the patient as peaceful as possible; more conversation might make him too excited. Although diagnosed as a cerebral thrombosis, his stroke seemed quite unusual, not accompanied by aphasia--he was still articulate and at times peculiarly voluble. As I wondered what to do, he raised his head and broke the silence. "What have you been doing these days?" he asked. His tone indicated that he must have thought we were in his office discussing my work. I answered, "I've been reviewing a Japanese textbook for the exam and--" "To hell with that!" he snapped. I was too shocked to say anything more. He went on, "Have you read the Bible by any chance?" He looked at me expectantly. "Yes, but not the unabridged Bible." Although puzzled by his question, I explained to him in the way I would report on a book I had just waded through. "Last year I read a condensed English version called Stories from the Bible, published by the Press

of Foreign Language Education. I wish I could get hold of a genuine Bible, though." In fact, a number of graduate students in the English program had written to Christian associations in the United States requesting the Bible, and some American churches had mailed them boxes of books, but so far every copy had been confiscated by China's customs. Mr. Yang said, "Then you know the story of Genesis, don't you?" "Yes, but not the whole book." "All right, in that case, let me tell you the story in its entirety." After a pause, he began delivering his self-invented Genesis with the same eloquence he exhibited when delivering lectures. But unlike in the classroom, where his smiles and gestures often mesmerized the students, here he sat unable to move a muscle, and his listless head hung so low that his eyes must have seen nothing but the white quilt over his legs. There was a bubbling sound in his nose, rendering his voice a little wheezy and tremulous. "When God created heaven and earth, all creatures were made equal. He did not intend to separate man from animals. All the creatures enjoyed not only the same kind of life but also the same span of life. They were equal in every way." What kind of Genesis is this? I asked myself. He's all confused, making fiction now. He spoke again. "Then why does man live longer than most animals? Why does he have a life different from those of the other creatures? According to Genesis it's because man was greedy and clever and appropriated many years of life from Monkey and Donkey." He exhaled, his cheeks puffy and his eyes narrowed. A fishtail of wrinkles spread from the end of his eye toward his temple. He went on, "One day God descended from heaven to inspect the world he had created. Monkey, Donkey, and Man came out to greet God with gratitude and to show their obedience. God asked them whether they were satisfied with life on earth. They all replied that they were. "Does anyone want something else?" asked God. "Hesitating for a moment, Monkey stepped forward and said, 'Lord, the earth is the best place where I can live. You have blessed so many trees with fruit that I need nothing more. But why did you let me live to the age of forty? After I reach thirty, I will become old and cannot climb up trees to pluck fruit. So I will have to accept whatever the young monkeys give me, and sometimes I will have to eat the cores and peels they drop to the ground. It hurts me to think I'd have to feed on their leavings. Lord, I do not want such a long life. Please take ten years off my life span. I'd prefer a shorter but active existence.' He stepped back, shaking fearfully. He knew it was a sin to be unsatisfied with what God had given him. "Your wish is granted,' God declared without any trace of anger. He then turned to Donkey, who had opened his mouth several times in silence. God asked him whether he too had something to say. "Timidly Donkey moved a step forward and said, 'Lord, I have the same problem. Your grace has enriched the land where so much grass grows that I can choose the most tender to eat. Although Man treats me unequally and forces me to work for him, I won't complain because you gave him more brains and me more muscles. But a life span of forty years is too long for me. When I grow old and my legs are no longer sturdy and nimble, I will still have to carry heavy loads for Man and suffer his lashes. This will be too miserable for me. Please take ten years off my life too. I want a shorter existence without old age.' "Your wish is granted.' God was very generous with them that day and meant to gratify all their requests. Then he turned to Man, who seemed also to have something to say. God asked, 'You too have a complaint? Tell me, Adam, what is on your mind.' "Man was fearful because he had abused the animals and could be punished for that. Nevertheless, he came forward and began to speak. 'Our Greatest Lord, I always enjoy everything you have created. You endowed me with a brain that enables me to outsmart the animals, who are all willing to obey and serve me. Contrary to Monkey and Donkey, a life span of forty years is too short for me. I would love to live longer. I want to spend more time with my wife, Eve, and my children. Even if I grow old with stiff limbs, I can still use my brain to manage my affairs. I can issue orders, teach lessons, deliver lectures, and write books. Please give their twenty years to me.' Man bowed his head as he remembered that it was a sin to assume his superiority over the animals. "To Man's amazement, God did not reprimand him and instead replied, 'Your wish is also granted. Since you enjoy my creation so much, I'll give you an additional ten years. Now, altogether you will have seventy years for your life. Spend your ripe old age happily with your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Use your brain wisely.'" Mr. Yang paused, looking pale and exhausted, sweat glistening on his nose and a vein in his neck pulsating. Then he said dolefully, "Donkey, Monkey, and Man were all satisfied that day. From then on, human beings can live to the age of seventy whereas monkeys and donkeys can live only thirty years."