

At the height of Maos infamous Cultural Revolution, two boys are among hundreds of thousands exiled to the countryside for re-education. The narrator and his best friend, Luo, guilty of being the sons of doctors, find themselves in a remote village where, among the peasants of the Phoenix mountains, they are made to cart buckets of excrement up and down the precipitous winding paths. Their meager distractions include a violin - and, before long, the beautiful daughter of the local tailor. But it is when the two discover a hidden stash of Western classics in Chinese translation that their re-education takes its most surprising turn. While ingeniously concealing their forbidden treasure, the boys find transit to worlds they had thought lost forever. And after listening to their dangerously seductive retellings of Balzac, even the Little Seamstress will be forever transformed. From within the hopelessness and terror of one of the darkest passages in human history, Dai Sijie has fashioned a beguiling and unexpected story about the resilience of the human spirit, the wonder of romantic awakening, and the magical power of storytelling.

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