

“This book is the answer to your question: Am I not worthy of love just because I’m cruel and disgusting? It’s for those of us who deeply understand that everything has a price, including us, our souls, and each of our body parts. Not because we want it that way, but because you, you who are reading this, have made clear to us, for our entire lives, that our bodies and love and voices are objects with respective values. An all-consuming anger had me devouring this book in one sitting. And the book devoured me. We burned together.”

—MITSKI

“Jenny Zhang will always be one of the most important poets writing today. She consistently and constantly stretches the lyric to its necessary and best intentions, telling it where it only may dream or dare to go. In *My Baby First Birthday*, she grapples with the very essence of being, how caustic and necessary it is to exist, how cruel the world is with little remorse or self-reflection, and how painful and glorious it can be to ‘flick[] cum out/beautiful white globs that dry mid-air.’ Throughout all of its bleak conclusions about the present, *My Baby First Birthday* provides immense hope, too. For it was when we were babies—and almost just simply ideas—that we felt real and unconditional love. Perhaps, these poems suggest, we can exist in this welcoming space again one day, if we recognize our faults as humans (of which there are many) and correctly worship our delicious brutality and appeal. Perhaps, this book says, it’s the human instinct in us to dream that gives us the greatest possibility of a healthy future. Dream, Zhang implores here. And we do.”

—DOROTHEA LASKY, AUTHOR OF *MILK*

"*My Baby First Birthday* is like performing when you suspect someone is watching vs when you hope someone will pay attention. It's viscous, oozing with anger and humor and sexy sexy death. I love how it opens and opens and opens itself, exasperated by the world history of contradiction & inequality—yet, despite itself, retains a tender, caring core. This book is literally breathtaking.

By the end I had to remind myself to breathe."

—TOMMY PICO, AUTHOR OF *FEED*

"Rabelais wrote *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Jenny Zhang wrote *My Baby First Birthday*, a marvelous book full of cunts, puke, farting oceans, and seppuku, which amounts to an accuracy of feeling. I will probably get in trouble for putting Rabelais in a blurb because almost nobody reads old books or really any books. Jenny Zhang makes me feel alive. Her rage and appetites are unslakable. If everything feels stupid and wrong to you, congratulations: read this book."

—ARIANA REINES, AUTHOR OF *A SAND BOOK*

PRAISE FOR *SOUR HEART*

Winner of the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction and the L.A. Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction, and named a best book of the year by *The New Yorker*; NPR; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *The Guardian*; *Esquire*; *New York*; and BuzzFeed

"[Jenny Zhang's] coming-of-age tales are coarse and funny, sweet and sour, told in language that's rough-hewn yet pulsating with energy."

—*USA TODAY*

"One of the knockout fiction debuts of the year."

—*NEW YORK*

"Compelling writing about what it means to be a teenager . . . It's brilliant, it's dark, but it's also humorous and filled with love."

—ISAAC FITZGERALD, *TODAY*

"A combustible collection . . . in a class of its own."

—BOOKLIST (STARRED REVIEW)

"Gorgeous and grotesque . . . [a] tremendous debut."

—*SLATE*

MY BABY
FIRST BIRTHDAY
JENNY ZHANG



TIN HOUSE BOOKS / Portland, Oregon

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for my friends

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FALL

I keep thinking there is an august

if there is an august
there is an august
I would probably write every day
but some days I get caught up
rubbing my pussy
checking for pimples
green ones pop on their own
when I need to cum
or when I'm flicking cum out
beautiful white globs that dry mid-air
I would be lazier than this
but then it would be
celestial
a star in midsummer
summer solstice long gone
the weird feeling of being alone
of consummating love
why do my friends look forward
to the best day of their lives
do they secretly wish
they were already dead?
do I?
does he?

do all of us
already know something
of death
the next life
the old world
in the old country
they ate the horses they rode on
and no one said anything stupid
like how life is both impossible
and happening at the same time
no one spoke thru the ground to touch
- god -
but that was the old country
where my mother is from
where you're from
your mother studied my mother
your recreational sports came from our rivers
your houses were decorated
with objects so rare my people have only heard about them
in songs passed down by the one family member who befriended
a European traveler
whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy me
yr people cried
while visiting the old country
where I have never been
the place where I was first touched
a sudden bloom of algae
in the ancient lake
where all the animals touched skin to skin fur to fur paw to paw fin
to fin mouth to mouth hole to hole and became family

summer solstice

will be significant
im going to release something
soft and radiant
and true
into the world

My baby first birthday

say something say something
if you see something say something
H1N1
each one teach one
because of avian flu my stupid cunt cousin
could not get an education
on your stupid cunt shores
where my mother sold her house
to give me a stupid cunt education
where I learned about social entrepreneurship
that it is a good thing
to give pencils to mothers
who are incarcerated
they can take those pencils and break them
in their stupid cunts
I bail out every one of those cunts
for ten grand a pop
they run rampant
like you fucking know what it's like
my detachable pussy is not afraid of being
approached by a man late at night
who is like hey girl
you don't need none of that

you look good without makeup
and I feel very sexy
because my cunt gets leashed to a tree
and waves hello to everyone
like hi like hi like hi hi hi
each one teach one
I teach each one to have one more
so in case this cunt dies
I have another
in case this man marries me
I can still fuck
I can still go to jail for fucking
I can still go to jail for not fucking
I can still go to jail and have it all
and have nothing
and wake up to my detached body intact
in this way you are never alone
in this way you are never translated
I said to say stop if you speak chinese
but it's worse to be visible than it is to be invisible
you see me and then tell my friend
she looks exactly like me
well she looks exactly like me
because she is me
and I'm also me
and I'm visible ya cunt
I'm miserable ya hero
I'm miserable and I speak perfect English
on the phone you agree

in person you ask me where I'm from *originally*
I seppuku on the spot and you are like
OK STOP
and I am like OKAY I STOPPED
and like there's no more
and like there's just that now
and like I am totally fine
and like I am gonna do it again
and like your poetry gives me a motherly halo
and like I am gonna have babies and get someone else to look after them
and like I'm dead but you won't stop
until my cunt re-attaches itself to my body
and that's when I will cease to go outside
and that's when I will cease to fear anything
you walk like a hero and I praise you
in front of my family
the only ones who know me
and I don't have time for less thoughts
more slowly
more meaning
less quickly
I am running to catch the bus
my cunt makes it
of course
but me
I am tired
I am out of breath
lying on a map
and the city where I was born

disappears mysteriously
like anyway I know who did it
I will praise him in front of his family
who have never seen him chase after a bus
full of cunts
like I have
who will never know him
like I do
like I know
like I know
like I know

everything is scary but yr love is good

goo goo baby

sweet baby

be the baby ppl didn't let u be

for once in yr life

& see what happens

Flush in the spirals of black holes

you didn't just want to puke in your mother's mouth you wanted her to feel as big and lonesome as the puke that did not want you if it wanted you wouldn't it have stayed inside wouldn't it have said hi and been more reasonable and less lonely and less afraid of the sun and of drying in your hands where it was born alive and wet and not inside but you wanted to expel it like you want to expel things that have nowhere to go like I am someone who has no where to go no mother to live inside like your mother does not live inside her mother so what now like every mother has to live separately and your puke has to live outdoors and we have to live like children live never knowing how to be mothers or fathers never wanting our families to die so we don't have to start our own and then the world can be puked on by a different world and the universe is the wide open mouth we live inside the puked-on stars and the puked-on asteroids and the puke riding on the backs of comets saying woooooooooo and the puke swirling flush in the spirals of black holes is like woooooooooo and we are like woooooooooo you and I stand in your puke and I hold your hand and you tell me you don't recognize me at all and I want to be those comets and those asteroids and strap you onto a rock and fall through space forever puking into the endlessness that does not know its own infinity or anything at all, really!