Union Medical College, Sincerity Department Store, or Shanghai's Bund.
Third, Ms. Barlow has included historical and textual annotations in the
form of notes. These are aimed at both the Chinese-reading audience and
the exclusively English reader. Some of the notes explain the importance
of key terms. Some clarify a cultural usage. Others point to consistent
use of tropes, vocabulary, and logic.

To avoid excessive noting, the following information holds true for all
of the texts. Chinese names usually begin with the surname and tack onto
that a one- or two-syllable given name. A person might be called by her
or his full name, say Jiang Bingzhi, or more familiarly, “Lao (Old) Jiang”
or “Xiao (Young) Jiang,” depending upon whether the namers is junior
or senior to the named. The same person would be referred to familiarly
as jiejie (older sister) in the following ways, again assuming that
the namer is junior to the named: Bingjie, Zhijie, Bingzhi jiejie, and so on.
(Younger sister, meimei, and older/younger brother are just as elastic.)

Many people of Ding Ling’s generation either chose or were given two-
syllable names, a surname and one given ideograph. We have transliterated,
where the sense is not immediately clear, into two “words” any
name that begins with a surname. Thus, Wang Wei rather than Wangwei,
but Zibin not ZI Bin. Ding Ling’s pseudonym, which she chose in the
mid-twenties, has no great ideographic sense. As an anarchist gesture she
chose a name by arbitrarily selecting syllables from an open dictionary.
Not so arbitrarily perhaps, the ding signifies an adult human being, and
ling is the sound of two jade pieces striking each other.

“Miss Sophia’s Diary” depicts a cycle familiar to European dramas of
self-knowledge. The story was published in 1927, and contemporary
readers found the first-person rumination on loneliness and lust enthrall-
ing. In part they like it because both author and protagonist were female,
and older Chinese literary convention had discouraged women from
writing on erotic topics. In greater part, however, its popularity can be
ascribed to the skillful way Ding Ling handled the Oedipal trajectory:
Sophia succumbs to blind desire. She holds off the searing light of reality
for as long as she can but finally submits to the torments of self-
knowledge.

As a May Fourth text, “Miss Sophia’s Diary” is significant not only in
its description of female sexuality but in its use of Chinese and European
conventions. Ding Ling invokes both canons in her depiction of love
triangles. She bows to the late-eighteenth-century Chinese memoir Six
Chapters of the Floating Life when she hints that Sophia, Ling Jishi, and
Yun(je) might form a triangle. Yun, Sophia’s girlfriend, is a homophonic
reference (same pronunciation, different name) to Shen Fu’s wife, who,
he claimed in Six Chapters, died of love for the courtesan Han Yuan after
failing to acquire the girl to be her lover and his concubine.

“Miss Sophia’s Diary” ransacks Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, as most
of Ding Ling’s early stories do. The primary triangle of Weidi, Ling Jishi,
and Sophia is obvious. Sophia’s blindness and willful femininity resound
with Emma’s voice. “I’ve a lover,” Emma shouts in triumph, “a lover.”
“Sophia,” the diary reads, “Sophia has a lover.” Flaubert’s influence on
Ding Ling is most obvious in the story’s peculiar diction. The diary is
notoriously difficult to interpret because of what one critic has called its
“loose” language. Ding Ling didn’t use punctuation very consistently (it was new to Chinese), and she scattered semiclassical structures at will into her phrasing. Sophia’s diary sounds a lot like Madame Bovary in Chinese translation. The diction is a period mannerism, the mark of the writer’s sophisticated borrowing from Western-language sentence structure.

Both May Fourth writers and May Fourth feminists looked to Western literature for models of modern behavior. The category “woman” that Sophia transmitted to her readers contains a little Rousseau, a little Herbert Spencer, a little Maupassant. Her question “What is love?” echoes the torment of many liberated Chinese women who struggled against the contradictory claims of political rights and modern theories that made women less than men by nature. The “feminine” liberated woman is possessed by love. But to her everlasting sorrow, Sophia finds that the more feminine she becomes for Ling Jishi, the less clearly she can see herself.—TEB

December 24
The wind’s up again today. The blowing woke me before day broke. Then the boy came in to start the stove. I know I’ll never get back to sleep again. I also know that my head will start whirling if I don’t get up. Too many strange thoughts run through my mind when I lie wrapped in the covers. The doctor’s instructions are to sleep and eat a lot and not to read or think. Exactly what I find most impossible. I can never get to sleep until two or three o’clock in the morning and I’m awake again before dawn. On a windy day like today, it’s impossible to keep from brooding over every little thing. I can’t go outside when the wind’s this strong. What else can I do but brood,cooped up in this room with nothing to read. I can’t just sit vacantly by myself and wait for time to pass, can I? I endure it one day at a time, longing for winter to be over fast. When it gets warmer, my cough is bound to clear up a little. Then if I wanted to go south or back to school, I could. Oh God, this winter is endless!

As the sunlight hit the paper window, I was boiling my milk for the third time. I did it four times yesterday. I’m never really sure that it suits my taste, no matter how often I do it, but it’s the only thing that releases frustration on a windy day. Actually, though it gets me through an hour or so, I usually end up even more irritable than I was before. So all last week I didn’t play with it. Then out of desperation, I did, relying on it, as though I was already old, just to pass time. I read the newspaper as soon as it comes. I start, systematically, with the headlines, the national news, the important foreign reports, local gossip, and then . . . when I’ve finished the items on education, party propaganda, economics, and the stock market, I go back to the same announcements I read so thoroughly yesterday . . . and the day before . . . the ones recruiting new students, the notices of lawsuits over division of family property. I even read stuff like ads for “606” and “Mongolian Lark” venereal tonics, cosmetics, announcements of the latest shows at the Kaiming Theater, and the Zhenguang Movie Theater listing. When I’ve finished everything I toss the paper away, reluctantly. Every once in a while, of course, I find a new advertisement. But what I can never get free of are the fifth- and sixyear anniversary sales at the fabric shops, and the obituaries—with apologies to those not contacted personally.

Nothing to do after the paper except sit alone by the stove and work myself into a rage. What infuriates me is the daily routine. I get a nervous headache every day as I sit listening to the other inmates yell at the attendants. Such loud, braying, coarse, monotonous voices, “Attendant, bring hot water!” or “Wash basin, attendant!” You can imagine how ugly it sounds. And there is always somebody downstairs shouting into the telephone. Yet when the noise does let up, the silence scares me to death. Particularly inside the four whitewashed walls that stare blankly back at me no matter where I sit. If I try to escape by lying on the bed, I’m crushed by the ceiling, just as oppressively white. I can’t really find a single thing here that doesn’t disgust me: the poxmarked attendant, for example, and the food that always tastes like a filthy rag, the impassibly grimy window frame, and that mirror over the washbasin. Glancing from one side you’ve got a face a foot long; tilt your head slightly to the side and suddenly it gets so flat you startled yourself . . . It all infuriates me. Maybe I’m the only one affected. Still I’d really like a few fresh complaints and dissatisfactions. Novelty, for better or worse, always seems just out of reach.

WeiDi came over after lunch.2 The familiar hurried sound of his leather shoes carried all the way from the other end of the corridor and comforted me, as though I’d suddenly been released from a suffocating room. But I couldn’t show it. So when he came in, I simply glanced silently at him. WeiDi thought I was peeved again. He clasped my hands tightly and cried, “Sister, Elder Sister!” over and over. I smiled. Of course. Why? Oh, I know. I know what’s behind those shy glowing eyes. I understand what it is that he’d rather keep from others. You’ve been in love with me for such a long time, WeiDi. Has he captured me? That is not my respon-
sibility. I act as women are supposed to act. Actually, I’ve been quite aboard with him. There isn’t another woman alive who would have resisted toying with him, as I have. Besides, I’m genuinely sorry for him. There have been times when I couldn’t stand it any longer, when I wanted so badly to say, “Look, Weidi, can’t you find some better way of going about this? You’re making me sick.” I’d like Weidi a whole lot better if he’d wise up, but he persists with these stupid abandoned displays of affection.

Weidi was satisfied when I smiled. Rushing around to the other end of the bed, he tore off his overcoat and leather hat. If he’d turned his head and glanced at me just then, he’d have been saddened by my eyes. Why doesn’t he understand me better?

I’ve always wanted a man who would really understand me. If he doesn’t understand me and my needs, then what good are love and empathy? Father, my sisters, and all my friends end up blindly indulging me, although I never have figured out what it is in me that they love. Is it my arrogance, my temper? Or do they just pity me because I have TB? At times they infuriate me because of it, and then all their blind love and soothing words have the opposite effect. Those are the times that I wish I had someone who really understood. Even if he reviled me, I’d be proud and happy.

I think about them when they forget me. Or I get mad at them. But when somebody finally does come, I end up harassing him without really meaning to. It’s an impossible situation. Lately I’ve been trying to discipline myself not to say whatever jumps into my mind, so I don’t accidentally hurt people’s secret feelings when I’m really only joking. My resulting state of mind as I sit with Weidi can easily be imagined. If Weidi had stood up to go, I’d have hated him because of my depression and fear of loneliness. Weidi has known this for a long time, so he didn’t leave me until ten o’clock. But I deceive no one, certainly not myself. The fact that Weidi waited around so long gave him no special advantage. In fact, I ended up pitying him because he’s so easy to exploit and because he has such a gift for doing the wrong thing in love.

December 28
I invited Yufang and Yunlin out to the movies today. Yufang asked Jianru along, which made me so furious I almost burst into tears. Instead I started laughing. Oh, Jianru, Jianru, how you’ve crushed my self-respect. She looks and acts so much like a girlfriend I had when I was younger, that without being aware of what I was doing, I started chasing her. Initially she encouraged my intimacies. But I met with intolerable treatment from her in the end. Whenever I think about it, I hate myself for what I did in the past, for my regrettable unscrupulous behavior. One

week I wrote her at least eight long letters, maybe more, and she didn’t pay the slightest bit of attention to me. Whatever possessed Yufang to invite Jianru when she knows I don’t want to dredge up my past all over again? It’s as though she wanted to make me mad on purpose. I was furious.

Though there was no reason for Yufang and Yunlin to notice any change in my laugh, Jianru must have sensed something. But she can fake it—play stupid—so she went along as though there was nothing between us. I wanted to curse; the words were on the tip of my tongue, when I thought of the resolution I’d set myself. Also I felt that if I were that vehement she’d get even more stuck on herself. So I just kept my feelings to myself and went out with them.

We got to the Zhenguang Theater early and met some girls from our province at the door. Those girls and their practiced smiles make me sick. I ignored them. Then I got inexplicably angry at all the people waiting to see the movie. So I capitalized on the situation, and as Yufang talked heatedly with the girls, I slipped away from my guests and came home.

I am the only person who can excuse what I did. They all criticize me, but they don’t know the feelings I endure when I am with other people. People say I am eccentric, but no one notices how often I’m willing to toady for affection and approval. No one will ever encourage me to say things that contradict my first impulses. They endure my eccentricities constantly, which gives me even more cause to reflect on my behavior, and that ends up alienating me even further from them.

It is very late and the entire residence is quiet. I’ve been lying here on the bed a long time. I have thought through a lot of things. Why am I still so upset?

December 29
Yufang phoned me early this morning. She’s a good person and wouldn’t lie, so I suppose Jianru really is sick. Yufang told me that Jianru is sick because of me and wants me to come over so she can explain herself. Yufang and Jianru couldn’t be more mistaken. Sophia is not a person who likes listening to explanations. I see no need for explanations of any kind. If friends get along that’s great; when you have a falling out and give someone a hard time, that’s fair enough too. I think I am big enough not to require more revenge. Jianru got sick because of me. I think that’s great. I’d never refuse the lovely news that somebody had gotten sick over me. Anyway, Jianru’s illness eases some of the self-loathing I’ve been feeling.

I really don’t know what to make of myself. Sometimes I can feel a kind of boundless unfathomable misery at the sight of a white cloud
being blown and scattered by the wind. Yet faced with a young man of, what, about twenty-five?—Weidi is actually four years older than I—I find myself laughing with the satisfaction of a savage as his tears fall on my folded hands. Weidi came over from Dongcheng with a gift of stationery and envelopes. Because he was happy and laughing, I teased him mercilessly until he burst into tears. That cheered me up, so I said, “Please, please! Spare the tears. Don’t imagine I’m so feminine and weak that I can’t resist a tear. If you want to cry, go home and do it. You’re bothering me.” He didn’t leave. He didn’t make any excuses, either, or get sullen, of course... He just curled up in the corner of the chair, as tears from God knows where streamed openly, soundlessly, down his face. While this pleased me, I was still a little ashamed of myself. So I patted his head in a sisterly way and told him to go wash his face. He smiled through his tears.

When this honest, open man was here, I used all the cruelty of my nature to make him suffer. Yet once he’d left, there was nothing I wanted more than to snatch him back and plead with him: “I know I was wrong. Don’t love a woman so undeserving of your affection as I am.”

January 1

I don’t know how people who like to party spent their New Year’s. I just added an egg to my milk. I had the egg left over from the twenty that Weidi brought me yesterday. I’ve boiled seven eggs in a tea broth; the remaining thirteen are probably left for me for the next two weeks. If Weidi had come while I was eating lunch, I’d have had a chance to get a couple of canned things. I really hoped he’d come. In anticipation, I went out to the Danpai Building and bought four boxes of candy, two cartons of dianxin, and a basket of fruit to feed him when he got here. I was that certain he’d be the only one to come today. But lunch came and went and Weidi hadn’t arrived.

I sat and wrote five letters with the fine pen and stationery he’d brought me a few days ago. I’d been hoping I’d get some New Year’s picture postcards in the mail, but I didn’t. Even the few girlfriends I have who most enjoy this kind of thing forgot that they owed me. I shouldn’t be surprised that I don’t get postcards. Still, when they forget about me completely, it does make me mad. On the other hand, considering that I never paid anyone else a New Year’s visit—forget it! I deserve it.

I was very annoyed when I had to eat dinner all by myself.

Toward evening Yufang and Yunlin did come over, bringing a tall young fellow with them. How fortunate they are. Yufang has Yunlin to love her and that satisfies them both. Happiness isn’t just possessing a lover. It’s two people, neither of whom wants anything more than each other, passing their days in peace and conversation. Some people might find such a pedestrian life unsatisfying, but then not everyone is like my Yufang.

She’s terrific. Since she has her Yunlin, she wants “all lovers to be united.” Last year she tried to arrange a love match for Marie. She wants things to work out for Weidi and me, too, so every time she comes over she asks about him. She, Yunlin, and the tall man ate up all the food I’d bought for Weidi.

That tall guy is stunning. For the first time, I found myself really attracted to masculine beauty. I’d never paid much attention before. I’ve always felt that it was normal for men to be glib, phony, cautious; that’s about the extent of it. But today as I watched the tall one, I saw how a man could be cast in a different, a noble, mold. Yunlin looked so insignificant and clumsy by comparison... Pity overwhelmed me. How painful Yunlin would find his own coarse appearance and rude behavior, if he could see himself. I wonder what Yufang feels when she compares the two, one tall, the other not.

How can I describe the beauty of this strange man? His stature, pale delicate features, fine lips, and soft hair are quite dazzling enough. But there is an elegance to him, difficult to describe, an elusive quality, that shook me profoundly. When I asked his name, he handed me his name card with extraordinary grace and finesse. I raised my eyes. I looked at his soft, red, moist, deeply inset lips, and let out my breath slightly. How could I admit to anyone that I gazed at those provocative lips like a small hungry child eyeing sweets? I know very well that in this society I’m forbidden to take what I need to gratify my desires and frustrations, even when it clearly wouldn’t hurt anybody. I did the only thing I could. I lowered my head patiently and quietly read the name printed on the card, “Ling Jishi, Singapore... .”

Ling Jishi laughed and talked uninhibitedly with us as though he were with old, intimate friends; or was he flirting with me? I was so eager to avoid seduction that I didn’t dare look directly at him. It made me furious when I could not bring myself to go into the lighted area in front of the table. My ragged slippers had never bothered me before, yet now I found myself ashamed of them. That made me angry at myself: how can I have been so restrained and boring. Usually I find undue attention to social form despicable. Today I found out how moronic and graceless I could seem. Mmm! He must think I’m right off the farm.

Yufang and Yunlin got the feeling that I didn’t like him, I was acting so woodenly, so they kept interrupting the conversation. Before long they took him off. They meant well. I just can’t find it in me to be grateful. When I saw their shadows—two short, one tall—disappearing through
the downstairs courtyard, I really didn’t want to return to my room, now suffused with the marks of his shoes, his sounds, the crumbs of his cake.

January 3
I’ve spent two full nights coughing. I’ve lost all faith in the medicine. Is there no relationship at all between medicine and illness? I am sick to death of the bitter medicine, but still I take it on schedule, as prescribed; if I refuse medication, how can I allow myself any hope for recovery? God arranges all sorts of pain for us before we die to make us patient and to prevent us from rushing toward death too eagerly. Me? My time is brief, so I love life with greater urgency than most. I don’t fear death. I just feel that I haven’t gotten any pleasure out of life. I want ... all I want is to be happy. I spend days and nights dreaming up ways I could die without regret. I imagine myself resting on a bed in a gorgeous bedroom, my sisters nearby on a bearskin rug praying for me, and my father sighing as he gazes quietly out the window. I’ll be reading long letters from those who love me, friends who will remember me with their tears. I urgently need emotional support from all these people; I long for the impossible. What do I get from them? I have been imprisoned in this residence for two full days: no one has visited me and I haven’t even gotten any mail. I lie in bed and cough; I sit on the stove and cough; I go in front of the table and cough—all the time brooding over these repulsive people ... Actually, I did receive a letter, but that just completed my total wretchedness. It was from a tough Anhui guy who was pestering me a year ago. I ripped it up before I had even finished reading it. It made my flesh crawl, reading page after page of “love, love, love, love, love.” How do I despise grandstand affection from people I loathe.

But can I name what I really need?

January 4
I just don’t know how things went so wrong. Why did I want to move? In all the fuss and confusion I’ve also deceived Yunlin. The lies came so easily I felt I almost had an instinct for it. Were Yunlin to know Sophia was capable of deceiving him, how wretched he would be. Sophia is the baby sister they love so much. Of course I’m upset now, and I regret everything. But I still can’t make up my mind. Should I move? Or not?

I had to admit to myself, “You’re dreaming about that tall man.” And it’s true: for the last few days and nights I have been enmeshed in wonderful fantasies. Why hasn’t he come over on his own? He should know better than to let me languish for so long. I’d feel so much better if he’d come over and tell me that he’d been thinking of me too. If he did, I know I wouldn’t have been able to control myself, and I’d have listened to him declare his love for me and then I’d let him know what I wanted. But he didn’t come. I guess fairy tales don’t usually come true. Should I go looking for him? A woman that uninhibited would risk having everything blow up in her face. I still want people to respect me. Since I couldn’t think of a good solution, I decided to go to Yunlin’s place and see what would happen. After lunch I braved the wind and set off for Dongcheng.

Yunlin is a student at Jingdu University and rents a room in a house in Qingnian Lane near the university, between the first and second colleges. Fortunately I got there before he’d left and before Yufang had arrived. Yunlin was surprised to see me out on such a windy day, but wasn’t suspicious when I told him I’d been to the German Hospital and was just stopping by on my way home. He asked about my health. I led the conversation around to the other evening. Without wasting any energy, I found out that Ling Jishi lives in Dormitory No. 4 in the second college. After a while I started to sigh and talk in vivid terms about my life at Xicheng Residence Hall, how lonely and dismal it was. And then I lied again. I said I wanted to move because I want to be near Yufang. (I already know that Yufang was going to move in with him.) When I asked Yunlin if he would come help me find a room nearby, he seemed delighted and didn’t hesitate to offer his help.

While we were looking around for a room, we just happened to run into Ling Jishi. So he joined us. I was ecstatic and the ecstasy made me bold enough to look right at him several times. He didn’t notice. When he asked about my health and I told him I’d completely recovered, he just smiled, skeptically.

I settled on a small, moldy room with low ceilings in the Dayuan Apartment House next door to Yunlin. Both Ling Jishi and Yunlin said it was too damp, but nothing they said could shake my determination to move in the next day. The reason I gave was that I was tired of the other place and desperately needed to be near Yufang. There was nothing Yunlin could do, so he agreed and said that he and Yufang would be over to help me tomorrow.

How can I admit to anyone that my only reason for choosing that room was because it’s located between the fourth dormitory and Yunlin’s place?

He didn’t say goodbye to me so I went back to Yunlin’s with them, mustering all my courage to keep on chatting and laughing. Meanwhile I subjected him to the most searching scrutiny. I was possessed with a desire to mark every part of his body with my lips. Has he any idea how I’m sizing him up? Later I deliberately said that I wanted to ask Ling Jishi to help me with my English. When Yunlin laughed, Ling Jishi was taken aback and gave a vague, embarrassed reply. He can’t be too much
of a bastard, I thought to myself, otherwise—a big tall man like that—he'd never have blushed so red in the face. My passion raged with new ferocity. But since I was concerned that the others would notice and see through me too easily, I dismissed myself and came home early.

Now that I have time for reflection, I can't imagine my impulsiveness driving me into any worse situation. Let me stay in this room with its iron stove. How can I say I'm in love with this man from Singapore? I don't know anything about him. All this stuff about his lips, his eyebrows, his eyelashes, his hands, is pure fantasy. These aren't things a person should need. I've become obsessive if that's all I can think about now. I refuse to move. I'm determined to stay here and recover my health.

I'm decided now. I'm so full of regret! I regret all the wrong things I did today; things a decent woman would never do.

January 6

Everyone said I was being terribly foolish when they heard I'd moved. And when Jin Ying from Nancheng and Jiang and Zhou from Xicheng all came over to my damp little room to see me and I started laughing and rolling around on the bed, they all said I was acting like a baby. That amused me all the more and made me consider telling them what's really on my mind. Weidi dropped by this afternoon too, miserable because I'd moved without discussing it with him first and because now I'm even farther from him. He looked straight through Yunlin when he saw him. Yunlin, who couldn't figure out why he was so angry, stared right back. Weidi's face darkened even further. I was amused. "Too bad," I said to myself, "Weidi's blaming the wrong man."

Yufang never brings up the subject of Jianru anymore. She has decided to move into Yunlin's room in two or three days. She knows I want to be near her and won't leave me alone longer than that. She and Yunlin have been even warmer than ever.

January 10

I've seen Ling Jishi every day, but I've never spoken more than a few words to him, and I'm determined it's not going to be me who mentions the English lessons first. It makes me laugh to see how he goes to Yunlin's twice a day now. I'm certain he's never been this close to him before. I haven't invited Ling Jishi over, either; and although he's asked several times how things are going now that I've moved, I've pretended not to get the hint and just smile back. It's like planning a battle. Now I'm concentrating all my energy on strategy. I want something, but I'm not willing to go and take it. I must find a tactic that gets it offered to me voluntarily. I understand myself completely. I am a thoroughly female woman, and women concentrate everything on the man they've got in their sights. I want to possess him. I want unconditional surrender of his heart. I want him kneeling down in front of me, begging me to kiss him. I'm delirious. I go over and over the steps I must take to implement my scheme. I've lost my mind.

Yufang and Yunlin don't detect my excitement; they just tell me I'll be getting better soon. Actually, I don't want them to know. When they say how improved I am, I act as if I'm pleased.

January 12

Yufang already moved in, but Yunlin moved out. I can't believe the two of them; they're so afraid of her getting pregnant that they won't live together. I suppose they feel that since they can't trust themselves to make "good" decisions when they're in bed together, the best solution is to remove sexual temptation completely. According to them, necking is not too dangerous, so their list of proscriptions doesn't preclude the occasional stolen encounter. I can't help scoffing at her asceticism. Why shouldn't you embrace your lover's naked body? Why repress this part of love? How can they be so preoccupied with all the details before they've even slept together! I won't believe love is so logical and scientific.

Of course, when I tease them they never get angry. They're proud of their purity, and laugh at my childishness. I suppose I understand how they feel; it's just another one of those strange, unexplained things that happen in life.

I went to Yunlin's tonight (I guess I should call it Yufang's now) and we told ghost stories, so I didn't get back until ten o'clock. When I was a child I used to sit in my Auntie's lap and listen to Uncle tell strange tales from the Liaozhai all the time.† I loved to hear them, especially at night; but I never let anyone know how much they frightened me, because if you said you were afraid, that was the end of the stories. The children wouldn't be allowed out of bed and Uncle would have disappeared back into the study. Later, in school, I learned some rudimentary science from the teachers, and pockmarked Mr. Zhou inspired me enough to trust the books so I outgrew my terror of ghosts. Now that I'm grown up, I always deny the existence of ghosts. But you can't halt fear by simple declaration, and the thought of ghosts still makes my hair stand on end. No one grasps fully how eager I am to change the subject when the topic comes up. That's because later, when I'm sleeping alone under the covers at night, I think about my dead Auntie and Uncle and it breaks my heart.

On the way back, I felt a little jumpy when I saw the dark alley way. What would I do, I thought, if a monstrous yellow face appeared in the corner, or a pair of hairy hands reached out at me from that frozen alley. But a glance at the tall strapping man beside me—Ling Jishi—acting as
my bodyguard, reassured me. So when Yufang asked me if I was frightened, I just said, "No. No, I'm not."

Yunlin left with us to go back to his new room. He went south, and we went north, so we'd only gone three or four steps when the sound of his rubber-soled shoes on the muddy boards was no longer audible. "Sophia, you must be scared," said Ling Jishi, reaching out to put his arm around my waist. I considered freeing myself, but couldn't. My head rested on his shoulder. What would I look like in the light, I thought, wrapped in the arms of a man so much taller than I am? I wriggled and slipped free of him. He let go, stood beside me, and knocked at the door.

The alley was extremely dark. But I could clearly see which way he was looking. My heart fluttered slightly as I waited for the gate to open.

"Sophia, you're frightened."

The bolt creaked open as the doorman asked who was there.

"Good ni . . ." I said, but before I'd finished, Ling Jishi was holding my hand tightly.

Seeing the large man standing beside me, the doorman looked surprised.

When the two of us were alone in my room, my bravado disappeared.

I tried to conceal my discomfort with a little conventional chatter, but couldn't manage that either. "Sit down" was all that came out, and I went to wash my face. I can't remember how we got off the subject of the supernatural.

"Sophia, are you still interested in studying English?" he suddenly asked.

It was he who had come looking for me. He's the one who brought up the subject of English. He'd never sacrifice his time just to help me with my English, and no one as old as I, over twenty, could be deceived by such an offer. I smiled and said, "I'm too stupid. I probably wouldn't do very well. I'd just make a fool out of myself."

He didn't say anything, just picked up a photograph from the table and toyed with it. It was a picture of my older sister's daughter, who had just turned one.

By that time I'd finished washing my face and was sitting at the end of the table. He looked at me and then back at the little girl, then at me again. It's quite true. She does look a lot like me, so I asked him, "Cute, isn't she? Does she remind you of me?"

"Who is she?" There was unusual earnestness in his voice.

"Tell me, don't you think she's cute?"

He asked again who she was.

Suddenly I realized what he meant by the question, and I had an impulse to lie about it. "She's mine." I snatched the photograph and kissed it.

He believed me. I made a fool of him. My lie was a complete success. His seductiveness faded in the face of my triumph. Otherwise how—once he'd revealed such naiveté—how was I suddenly able to ignore the power of his eyes and become so indifferent to his lips? I had triumphed indeed, but it cast a chill over my heated passion. After he left, I was consumed with regret for all the obvious chances I'd let slip away. If I'd shown more interest when he pressed my hand, if I'd let him know I couldn't refuse him, he'd have gone a lot further. I'm convinced that if you dare to have sex with someone you find reasonably attractive, the pleasure must be like bones dissolving, flesh melting. Why was I so strict and tight with him? Why had I moved to this shabby room in the first place?

January 15

I certainly haven't been lonely recently. Every day I go next door to visit, and at night I sit and talk to my new friend. Yet my condition continues to deteriorate. That discourages me, naturally, since nothing I desire ever ends up helping me. Is this craving really love? It's all so completely absurd. Yet when I think about dying—and I think about it frequently—I'm filled with despair. Every time I see Dr. Kelly's expression I think to myself, it's true, say what you like: there's no hope left, is there? I laugh to mask the tears. No one knows how I cry my eyes out late at night.

Ling Jishi has been over several nights in a row, and he's telling everybody he's helping me with my English. Yundi asked me how it was going, but what could I say? This evening I took a copy of Poor Folk and put it in front of Ling Jishi, who actually began to tutor me, but then I threw the book aside. "You needn't tell people you are helping me with my English anymore," I said. "I'm sick and no one believes it anyway." "Sophia," he said hastily, "shall we wait until you're feeling better? I'll do whatever you want, Sophia."

My new friend is quite captivating. Yet for some reason I can't bring myself to pay much attention to him. Every night as I watch him leave morosely, I feel intense regret. Tonight, as he put on his overcoat I said to him, "I'm sorry. Forgive me, but I'm sick." He misunderstood what I meant, took it for convention. "It doesn't matter. I'm not afraid of infection," he said. Later I thought that over. Perhaps his comment had a double meaning. I don't dare believe people are as simple as they appear on the surface.

January 16

Today I received a letter from Yunjie in Shanghai that has plunged me into a deep depression. How will I ever find the right words to comfort her? In her letter she said, "My life, my love are meaningless now."
Meaning, I suppose, that she has less need than ever for my condolences or tears shed for her. I can imagine from her letter what married life has been like even though she doesn't spell it out in detail. Why does God play tricks on people in love like her? Yunjie is a very emotional and passionate person, so it's not surprising that she finds her husband's growing indifference, his badly concealed pretense at affection unbearable... I'd like her to come to Beijing, but is it possible? I doubt it.

I gave Yunjie's letter to Weidi when he came over, and he was genuinely upset because the very man making Yunjie despair is, unfortunately, his own older brother. I told Weidi about my new "philosophy of life." And, true to form, he did the only thing instinct gives him leave to do—he burst into tears. I watched impassively as his eyes turned red and he dried them with his hands. Then I taunted him with a cruel running commentary on his little crying jag. It simply didn't occur to me then that he might indeed be the exception, a genuinely sincere person. Before long I slipped off quietly by myself.

In order to avoid everyone I know, I walked alone around the frigid, lonely park until very late. I don't know how I endured the time. I was obsessed with one thought: "How meaningless everything is, how I'd rather die and have done with it."

January 17
I was just thinking, maybe I'm going crazy. It's fine with me if I lose my mind. I think, once I've got to that point, life's sorrows will never touch me again... It's been six months since I stopped drinking because of my illness. Today I drank again, seriously. I can see that what I'm puking now as a consequence is blood-redder than wine. But my heart seemed commanded by something else, and I drank as though the liquor might ease me toward my death tonight. I'm so tired of being obsessed by these same endless complications.

January 18
Right now I'm still resting in my bed. But before long I'll be leaving this room, maybe forever. Can I be certain I'll ever have the pleasure of touching these things again—this pillow, my quilt? Yufang, Yunlin, Weidi, and Jinxia are all sitting protectively in a gloomy little circle around me, waiting anxiously for dawn when they can send me to the hospital. I was awakened by their sad whispers. Since I didn't feel much like talking, I lay back and thought carefully over what had happened yesterday morning. It wasn't until I smelled the stench of blood and wine in the room that I was overcome with agony and convulsive tears. I had a premonition of death as I lay in the heavy silence and watched their dark, an-

guished faces. Suppose I were to sleep on and not wake up... would they sit just as silently and oppressively around my cold, hard corpse? When they saw I was awake, they drew near me to ask how I felt. That's when I felt the full horror of death and separation. I grabbed at each of them and scrutinized their faces, as though to preserve the memory forever. They all wept, feeling, it seemed, that I was departing for the land of the dead. Especially Weidi; his whole face was swollen, distorted with tears. Oh! I thought, please, dear friends, cheer me up, don't make me feel worse. Then, quite unexpectedly, I started to laugh. I asked them to arrange a few things for me, so out from under my bed they dragged the big rattan box where I kept several little bundles wrapped in embroidered handkerchiefs. "Those are the ones I want with me when I go to Union Medical College," I told them. When they handed me the packages I showed them they were stuffed full of letters. I smiled again and said, "All your letters are here," which cheered them up a bit. I also had to smile when Weidi took a picture album from the drawer and pressed it on me as though he wanted me to take that along, too. It contains a half dozen or so photographs exclusively of Weidi. As a special favor I let him hold my hand, kiss it, and caress his face with it; and so, just as we'd finally dispelled the sensation that there was a corpse in the room, the pale light of day broke across the horizon. They all rushed about in an anxious flurry searching for a cab. Thus my life in the hospital began.

March 4
It was twenty days ago that I got the telegram notice of Yunjie's death. Yet for me each passing day means more hope of recovery. On the first of this month, the crowd that had brought me to the hospital moved me back to the freshly cleaned and tidied residence. Fearing I might get cold, they'd even set up a little iron coal stove. I have no idea how to convey my thanks. Especially to Weidi and Yufang. Jin and Zhou also stayed two nights before they had to go. Everyone has played nursemaid, letting me lie in bed all day feeling so comfortable it's hard to believe I'm living in a residence and not at home with my family. Yufang decided she's going to stay with me a couple more days, and then, when it warms up, she'll go to the Western Hills to find me a good place to convalesce. I am so looking forward to getting out of Beijing, but here it is March and it's still so cold! Yufang insists on staying here with me. And I can't really refuse, so the cot set up for Jin and Zhou remains for her to use.

I had a change of heart about some things during my stay in the hospital. I must credit it to the overwhelming kindness and generosity of my friends. Now the universe seems full of love. I am especially grateful to
Ling Jishi. It made me so proud when he visited me in the hospital. I thought that only a man as handsome as he should be allowed to come to the hospital to visit a sick girlfriend. Of course, I was also aware of how much the nurses envied me. One day that gorgeous Miss Yang asked me, “What’s that tall man to you?”

“A friend.” I ignored the crude implication.

“Is he from your home area?”

“No, he’s an overseas Chinese from Singapore.”

“Then he’s a classmate, right?”

“No, he isn’t.”

She smiled knowingly, “He’s just a friend, right?”

Of course I had no reason to blush and I could have called her on her rudeness, but I was ashamed to. She watched the way I closed my eyes indecisively, pretending to be sleepy. Finally she gave a satisfied laugh and walked off. After that she always annoyed me. To avoid further trouble, I lied whenever anyone asked about Wei. I said he was my brother. There was a little guy who was a good friend of Zhou’s whom I also lied about. I told them that he was a relative or close friend of the family from my home province.

When Yufang leaves for class and I am alone in the room, I reread all the letters I’ve gotten in the last month or so. It makes me feel happy and satisfied to know there are so many people who still remember me. I need to be remembered. The more the better. Father, needless to say, sent me another picture of himself, hair whiter than ever. My older sisters are all fine, but too busy taking care of their children to write more often.

I hadn’t yet finished rereading my letters when Ling Jishi came by again. I wanted to get up but he restrained me. When he took my hand, I could have wept for joy.

“Did you ever think I’d make it back to this room?” I asked him. He gazed, tangibly disappointed, at the spare bed shoved up against the wall. I told him that my guests were gone but that the bed was left up for Yufang. When he heard that, he told me that he was afraid of annoying Yufang and so he wouldn’t return that evening. I was ecstatic. “Aren’t you afraid that I’ll be annoyed?” I said.

He sat on the bed and told me in detail what had happened over the past month, how he had clashed with Yunlin over a difference of opinion: Ling Jishi felt I should have left the hospital earlier, but Yunlin had steadfastly refused to allow it. Yufang had agreed with Yunlin. Ling Jishi realized he hadn’t known me very long and that therefore his opinion did not carry much weight. So he gave up. When he happened to run into Yunlin at the hospital, he would leave first.

I knew what he meant, but I pretended not to understand. “You’re always talking about Yunlin,” I said. “If it hadn’t been for Yunlin, I wouldn’t have left the hospital at all, I was so much more comfortable there.” I watched him turn his head silently to one side. He didn’t answer.

When he thought Yufang was about to return, he told me quietly that he’d be back tomorrow. Then he left. Shortly after that Yufang came home. Yufang didn’t ask and I didn’t tell her anything. She doesn’t like to talk too much, since with my illness I might easily exhaust myself. That was fine with me. It gave me a chance to think of my own thoughts.

March 6

After Yufang went to class, leaving me alone in the room, I started thinking about weird things that go on between men and women. It’s not that I love boasting, actually, it’s just that my training in this regard is far greater than all of my friends’ combined. Still, recently I’ve felt at a spectacular loss to understand what is happening. When I sit alone with Ling Jishi, my heart leaps and I’m humiliated, frightened. But he just sits there, nonchalantly, reaching over to grasp my hand from time to time, and tells stories about his past with apparent naiveté. Although he carries on with supremely natural ease, I find that my fingers cannot rest quietly in his massive hand; they burn. Yet when he rises to go, I feel an attack of anxiety as though I am about to stumble into something really horrible. So I stare at him, and I’m not really sure whether my eyes seek pity or flash with resentment. Whatever he sees there, he ignores. But he seems to understand how I feel. “Yufang will be back soon,” he says. What can I say to that? He’s still afraid of Yufang! Normally I wouldn’t like to have anybody know what kind of private fantasies I’ve been having recently; on the other hand, I do feel the need to have someone understand my feelings. I’ve tried to talk indirectly with Yufang about this, but she just covers me with the quilt loyally and fusses about my medication. It depresses me.

March 8

Yufang has moved out, and Wei wants to take over her job. I knew I would be more comfortable with him here than I was when Yufang nursed me. If I wanted tea in the middle of the night, for instance, I wouldn’t have to creep back under my quilt with disappointment, as I did when I heard Yufang snoring and I didn’t think it would be fair to disturb her sleep. But I refused his kind offer, naturally. When he insisted, I told him bluntly, “If you are here I will be inconvenienced in a number of ways, and anyway I’m feeling better.”

He kept insisting that the room next door was empty. He could live there. I was just at my wit’s end when Ling Jishi came in. I didn’t think they knew each other, but Ling Jishi shook Wei’s hand and told me they’d met twice before at the hospital. Wei ignored him coldly.
“This is my little brother,” I said with a laugh to Ling Jishi. “He’s just a kid who doesn’t know how to act in mixed company. Drop by more often and we’ll have a great time together.” With that Weidi really did turn into a child, pulling a long face as he rose and left. I was annoyed that somebody had been present when this took place, and I felt it would be best to change the subject. I also felt apologetic toward Ling Jishi. But he didn’t seem to notice particularly. Instead he just asked, “Isn’t his last name Bai? How can he be your younger brother?”

I laughed. “So you only let people surnamed Ling call you ‘Little Brother’ or ‘Big Brother’,” I said to him, making him chuckle.

These days when young people get together, they love to explore the meaning of the word “love.” Although I feel at times that I understand love, in the end I can never really explain it. I know all about what goes on between men and women. Perhaps what I already know about it makes love seem vague, makes it hard for me to believe in love between the sexes, makes it impossible to think of myself as someone pure enough, innocent enough to be loved. I am skeptical of what everyone calls “love.” I’m just as skeptical of the love I’ve received.

I was just becoming aware of the realities of life when those who loved me made me suffer by allowing outsiders the chance to humiliate and slander me. Even my closest friends abandoned me. And it was precisely for fear of the threat of love that I left school. Although I mature more each day, those previous liaisons influenced me so much that I still have doubts about love and sometimes thoroughly despise the intimacy love brings. Weidi claims he loves me. Then why does he make me so miserable all the time? He came over again this evening, for instance, and as soon as he got here, he burst into tears and sobbed his eyes out. No matter what I said—“What’s wrong with you? Please talk to me” or “Weidi, say something, I beg you”—he just carried on as before. Nothing quite like this had ever happened before. I exhausted myself trying to guess what catastrophe had befallen him until I couldn’t think of any other possibilities. Eventually he cried himself out. Then he started in on me.

“I don’t like him.”

“Who’s bullying you, Weidi? Who made you cry and throw this tantrum?”

“I don’t like that tall guy. The one you’re so close to now.”

Oh! I really hadn’t realized until then that he was furious over something I had done. Without thinking, I started to chuckle. This insipid jealousy, this selfish possessiveness, this is love? I couldn’t help myself. I broke into laughter. And that, of course, did nothing to calm poor Weidi’s raging heart. In fact, my condescending attitude increased his fury. Watching his blazing eyes, I got the feeling that what he really wanted was to rip me to shreds. “Go ahead and do it,” I thought to myself. But he just put his head down, started bawling again, and rubbing tears from his eyes, staggered out the door.

A scene like this might conceivably be considered an ardent expression of tempestuous love. Yet Weidi stages these things for me with such artless lack of forethought that he defeats himself. I’m not asking him to be false or affected in the expression of his love. It’s just I feel it’s futile for him to try to move me by acting like a child. Maybe I’m just hard by nature. If so, I deserve all the anxiety and heartbreak that my failure to live up to people’s expectations has brought me.

As soon as Weidi left, I scrutinized my own intentions. I recalled in vivid detail someone else’s tenderness, someone else’s warmth, generosity, and openly passionate bearing, and I was so drunk with sweet joy that I took out a postcard, wrote a few sentences, and ordered the attendant to take it over to Dormitory No. 4.

March 9

When I see Ling Jishi sit so relaxed and casually in my room, I can’t help pitying Weidi. I pray that not every woman in the world will neglect and disdain his great sincerity, as I do, thus submerging myself in a morass of guilty sorrow I cannot get free of. More than that, I hope a pure young girl comes along who will redeem Weidi’s love, fill the emptiness he must feel.

March 13

I haven’t written anything in days. I don’t know whether it’s because I’m depressed or that I just can’t find the so-called right mood. All I know is that since yesterday all I’ve wanted is to cry. When the others see me crying, they think I’m homesick or worried about my health. When they see me smile, of course, they think I’m happy, radiant with the glow of improving health . . . but my “friends” are all the same. Who can I tell about my stupid moods, which I refuse to cry over but haven’t the strength to laugh at? Since I know it’s because I won’t forsake my ardent, worldly expectations, and because everything I try to do ends in disappointment, even I can no longer sympathize with myself when I end up heartbroken, as I invariably do. How can I possibly take pen in hand and spell out in detail all my self-accusations and self-hatred?

Yes, I guess I’m whining again. But it’s only silent suffering, the unrestrainable repetition of my own voice inside my head, so it doesn’t matter. I’ve never had the sort of courage it takes to let people see my agony or listen to me moan, although people very early on unconditionally labeled me as “haughty” and “eccentric.” Actually, I don’t want to whine so much as to cry. I want someone who’ll hold me close and let me sob,
I despised the gorgeous man. But as soon as I woke up, opened my tired eyes, the philistine was in my thoughts at once. I wondered ... Would he come today? When? Morning? Afternoon? Evening?

Then I leapt out of bed, quickly washed my face, made the bed. I picked up the large book I'd dropped on the floor last night and stroked its spine. It was a copy of Wilson's collected speeches, which Ling Jishi had left behind the night before.

March 14, evening
I've been living an illusion, an illusion which Ling Jishi created for me—and which he just destroyed. Because of him, I can drink the sweet wine of youthful love to my heart's content and spend the morning basking in the smile of love. Yet also because of him, I now appreciate this plaything "life." I've been disenchanted, think again of death; the self-loathing I feel at my own willingness to fall is the lightest punishment. Really, there are times when I wonder whether I have the strength to kill him in order to protect my romantic illusion.

I've thought it over and decided that to preserve the beautiful fantasy and prevent my vitality from ebbing away day by day it's best that I go immediately to the Western Hills. But Yufang says her friend in the Western Hills whom she'd asked to find a room hasn't answered her letter yet. I can't really make further inquiries or pressure her, can I? So I made my decision. I decided to give that bastard a taste of me when I'm not so passive, a little taste of my outrageous arrogance and sharp, derisive tongue.

March 17
The other night Weidi left in a great rage. Today he cautiously returned to make his meek peace with me, and I couldn't help chuckling at that. I found myself thinking how cute he is. If all a woman wanted was an honest man to live with, I don't think she could find anybody to match Weidi for reliability. "Weidi," I asked jokingly, "do you still hate me?" "I don't dare," he said, abashed. "You understand me, dear sister. I have no designs on you other that hoping you don't completely abandon me. I only want you to be healthy and happy. That's quite enough for me."

That is true devotion! Genuinely moving! How can an ashen face and ruby lips compare to this? Then I said to him, "Weidi, you're all right. The future is sure to bring you everything you've wanted." He responded with a pains smile. "That will never happen. I only wish things could be as you say." Not again. He was making me despair all over again! If only I could kneel down in front of him and beg him to love me like a friend or brother. Out of pure selfishness, I wish I could decrease these complications and increase my own happiness. Weidi loves me. And he

March 14
Is this love? Perhaps only love can influence us so powerfully; otherwise, how could my thoughts have been so easily reversed. When I fell asleep,
can mouth those lovely sounding words. But he overlooks two things: first, he really ought to cool his ardor, and second, he should learn to hide his love. I can't stand the pain of regret in the face of my own ambivalence toward this ingenious man.

March 18
I asked Xia to go to the Western Hills and find me a place to stay.

March 19
To my amazement, Ling Jishi hasn't been by in days. Then again, I don't dress well, I'm no good at entertaining, I'm a terrible housekeeper, I've got TB, and I'm broke. So why should he? I didn't need him in the first place. Only when he doesn't come, I feel so terrible and become convinced of his sickness. Could it really be that he's as genuine as Weidi, and when he read the note I sent him—"I'm sick. Please don't bother me anymore"—he believed it and stopped coming out of respect for my wishes? This uncertainty makes me want to see him again, if only to make sure once and for all what this strange creature sees when he looks at me.

March 20
Today I went over to Yunlin's place three times without bumping into the person I wanted to see. Yunlin suspected something and asked whether or not I had seen Ling Jishi over the past few days. I returned dispiritedly. I'm terribly worried and there's no sense deceiving myself; I've been thinking about him constantly.

Yufang and Yunlin came by at seven to invite me to Jingdu University to an English debate at Third College. Ling Jishi is the captain of the second team. My heart began to pound when I heard that last bit of news. But I used my health as an excuse to decline their kind invitation. I'm a useless weakling. I don't have the courage to withstand that kind of excitement. I still hope I won't have to see him. Yet as they left, I asked them to send my greetings to Ling Jishi and tell him I was asking after him. Damn. How stupid can I be!

March 21
I had just finished drinking my egg and milk when I heard the familiar knock at the door and a long shadow appeared on the paper window pane. My one thought was to leap up and open the door but at the direction of an inexplicable emotion, I swallowed hard and bowed my head. "Sophia, are you up?" His voice was so gentle that the second I heard it, I nearly burst out crying.

Did he just want to know if I was out of bed and sitting in the chair? Or was it to find out if I'd be capable of rage and refuse to see him? Tentatively he pushed the door open and came into the room. I didn't dare to raise my wet eyes.

"Are you feeling better? Did you just get up?"
I said nothing.
"You're really angry with me, aren't you, Sophia. I bore you. I'd guess I'd better go." It should have suited me fine to see him leave. Suddenly I missed my head, my gaze stopping at his hand as he reached for the door.
Who says he isn't a bastard? He understood the situation perfectly and boldly grasped my hand.
"Sophia, you're playing with me. I've passed your door every day but didn't dare come in. If Yunlin hadn't assured me you wouldn't get angry, I'd never have dared come today. Sophia, are you sick of me already?"

He dared to embrace me, had he kissed me passionately, I'd have fallen into his arms and cried, "I love you! God! I love you!" But he was so dispassionate, so cool and impassionate, that I hated him for it. "Come, hold me," I thought wildly, "I want to kiss your face!" Naturally, through all of this he was still holding my hands, his eyes fixed steadily on my face. I searched frantically but nowhere in his expression could I find what I wanted. Why is he only able to respond to my helplessness, my vulnerabilities? And why doesn't he understand what position he occupies in my heart? I wished I could kick him out, but a different kind of feeling dominated me. I shook my head, to indicate I wasn't upset at his coming over.

So once again I yielded to his shallow affection and listened while he talked animatedly about the stupid pleasures he enjoys so much, listened to him expound on his philosophy that making money and spending money sum up the meaning of life. I even acceded to his insinuation that I try acting more feminine. That made me despise him even more than before, and I cursed him and ridiculed him secretly, even as inwardly my fists struck painfully at my heart. Yet when he left me quite triumphantly, I was so upset I could barely contain myself. I'd repressed my frenzied desires. I hadn't begged him to stay.

He left.

March 21, evening
What a life I was living last year at this time! To trick Yunjie into babying me unreservedly, I'd pretend to be sick and refuse to get out of bed. I'd sit and whimper about the most trivial dissatisfaction to work on her tearful anxiety and get her to fondle me. Then there were the times when,
after spending an entire day in silent meditation, the mood of desolation I'd finally achieved made me unwilling to do anything, since by that time I could derive such utter sweetness from it. It hurts even more to think about the nights I spent lying on the grass in French Park listening to Yunjie sing “Peony Pavilion.” If she hadn't been tricked by God into loving that ashen-faced man, she would never have died so fast and I wouldn't have wandered into Beijing alone, trying, sick as I was, to fend for myself, friendless and without family. I admit I do have some friends here. Very sympathetic friends, in fact. But how could I possibly equate my relation to them with the love Yunjie and I had? When I think of Yunjie, I want so badly to lose myself in unrestrained sobs, the way I could do when we were together. But I've gotten more self-conscious this year. Even though I'm always on the edge of tears, I choke them back out of fear people will get tired of hearing about my troubles. Recently I've struggled even harder to understand why I get so desperately anxious. I no longer seem to find the time and leisure to sit and contemplate my own actions, my thoughts, my health, my reputation, or what, good or bad, is going to happen to me in the future. All day long my tangled mind revolves around what I try not to think about. It's precisely what I want to avoid that drives me to the extreme of mental distress. Besides stating for the record that I deserve to die, what other hope is there? Can I solicit sympathy and comfort? Even now I sound like I'm just begging for pity.

Yufang and Yunlin came over after dinner. When it got to be nine, I was still unwilling to let them go. I knew that Yufang could only stay a little longer, just to save my face. Yunlin seized on the pretext that he had to prepare for tomorrow's class and left alone. So very circumspectly I mentioned to Yufang how tormented I'd been feeling lately. I really thought she'd understand. I thought she'd take the initiative and force me to change my way of life, since I'm clearly not up to doing it myself. But when she heard what I had to say, she took it at its opposite meaning and warned me: “Sophia, I don’t think you're being honest. Naturally you don't intend anything, but you should be more careful about the way you look at men. You must realize that people like Ling Jishi are not like the guys we ran around with in Shanghai. They have very little contact with women and don’t understand well-intentioned friendliness. You don't want him to end up disappointed and unhappy, do you? I say this because I know you would never actually fall in love with a man like Ling.” The blame, it seemed, was on me now. If I hadn't enlisted her help but had just complained, would she have said such infuriating things to me? I swallowed my anger and smiled. “Yufang, don't make me out to be so awful!”

Yufang was willing to spend the night, but I got rid of her.

When they are feeling bad, talented women these days can write poems about “how depressed I am.” “Oh, the tragic sufferings of my heart,” and so on. I'm not gifted that way. I find I'm incapable of exploiting a poetic situation. Or even of letting my tears act as poems to somehow express the terrible war going on in my emotions. Actually, given this feeling of inadequacy, I ought to forget everything and pack myself off again to start my life over. I should make myself good with either a pen or a gun even if its purpose is just my own vanity or to win the praise of some shallow audience. I've lowered myself into a dominion of suffering worse than death. All for that man's soft hair and red lips . . .

It was the chivalric European medieval knights I was dreaming about. It's still not a bad comparison; anyone who looks at Ling Jishi can see it, though he also preserves his own special Eastern gentleness. God took all the other good qualities and lavished them on him. Why couldn't God make him intelligent? He doesn't understand what love is. If fact, he hasn't the slightest idea, though he has a wife (Yufang told me tonight), and once in Singapore he had a short affair with some woman in a rickshaw he'd chased on his bike. All those nights at the Hanjiatan brothel notwithstanding, has he ever really experienced a woman's love? Has he ever loved a woman? I dare say he has not.

A strange thought burned its way into my mind again. I think I'll teach this college boy a lesson. The universe is not as simple as he seems to think.

March 22

In my mental confusion I've managed to force myself to keep this diary. I initially started it because Yunjie wrote and asked me repeatedly to do so. Now even though Yunjie has been dead a long time, I can't bear to give it up. I suppose I'll go on forever, writing the diary in her memory as a testimonial to all the things she told me while she was alive. However much I'd rather not, I always feel I have to scrawl a page or so. I'd been dozing, but I couldn't stand seeing Yunjie's picture looking at me from its place on the wall, so I got up and started noting things down to avoid the pain of thinking about her. I have always felt I didn't want anybody but Yun reading this diary. That's because I was writing it primarily because she wanted to know about my life, which I recorded in quotidian detail, and second, because I'm afraid that another reader might turn the face of Reason on me, and I'd be devastated. It seems that I really do feel like a criminal when I violate the moral code that other people prize so highly. So for a long time, I've kept the little black leather
book under the mattress below my pillow. Today, inopportune, I disobeyed my original injunction. In retrospect it seems fated, though at the time I appeared to act without forethought. I did it because Weidi has been consistently misinterpreting me lately, using his observations to feed his chronic apprehension, then infesting me with his anxiety. I believe my behavior has always made my attitude perfectly clear. How could he possibly misunderstand me? If I told him directly, would that ablate his love? I often think that if it weren't Weidi but someone else, I'd know how to deal with it better. But no. He's such a good person that I just can't steel my heart against him. I had no other recourse. I gave him my diary to read. It was to show him the hopelessness of his situation, how undeserving of love, how cold and inconstant a woman I am. If, of course, by reading my diary, Weidi ended up understanding me, then he'd become my intimate confidant, the friend to whom I could pour out my heart, embrace earnestly, kiss. Then I'd become the most beloved, beautiful woman in the world, the woman of his desires.

Diary, Weidi read through the pages once. Then once again. All the while he remained self-composed despite tears. I had not anticipated this.

“Do you understand me,” I said.

He nodded.

“Do you believe me?”

“Concerning what?”

Finally his nod made sense. A reader who really understood would know that the diary revealed only a fraction of me, and could then help me see my limitations and misery. How could I hope for understanding from a reader, when all I give him is a diary carefully crafted to convey meaning solely through writing? That's devastating enough by itself. On top of that, Weidi was afraid that I'd thought he'd not fully understood me, so he burst out, “You love him. You love him! I’m not good enough for you.”

I nearly tore the diary to pieces out of spite. I'd debased it by letting Weidi see it—how could I claim otherwise?

“I want to go to sleep,” was all I could think of to say. “Come back tomorrow.”

We can expect nothing from other people. That's terrifying, isn't it? If Yunjie were alive and read my diary, I know that she'd hold me in her arms. “Oh, Sophia, my Sophia,” she'd cry. “Why can't my valor rescue Sophia from so much suffering?” But Yunjie is dead. I cannot figure the best way to grieve with this diary.

March 23

Ling Jishi said to me, “Sophia, you really are a strange girl.” This was not, I repeat, not praise based on a clear grasp of who I am. He finds strangeness in the fact that I wear tattered gloves, that I don’t perfume my dresser drawers, that at times for no reason I’ve been known to tear my new cotton-padded jacket, that I’ve saved some old toys from childhood. What else? He hears me laugh from time to time. There’s nothing more to it. He comprehends nothing. And I’ve never said anything to him that really came out of me. For instance, when he says, “I want to focus on making money from now on,” I laugh. When he talks about the time he went to the park with some friends to harass women students—“Boy, that was interesting, Sophia”—I laugh. All he really means by strange, of course, are things that fall outside the scope of his ordinary life. It hurts me deeply that I’m not able to command his respect and understanding. Now all I want is to go to the Western Hills. Contemplating the absurd fantasy he used to inspire in me, I can’t help laughing at myself.

March 24

When he’s here alone with me, I suffer scouring torment as I stare into his face and listen to the musical sound of his voice. Why don’t I crush his mouth with kisses, his temples, his...his whole body. The words “My lord and master! Grant me one kiss!” rise to my lips. But then reason overcomes me—no, no, I’ve never been reasonable. It’s my self-respect that surfaces and controls my emotions allowing me to choke back the words. My God! No matter how dreadful his ideas, there is no doubt he is driving me mad with desire, so why can’t I admit that I’m in love with him? Not only that, I know for certain fact that were he to hold me tightly in his arms, let me shower his body with kisses, and then throw me into the sea, or into an inferno, I would happily close my eyes and await the arrival of the death that sealed my love. God! I love him so much. Let him give me a sweet death; I’ll be satisfied...

March 24, midnight

I’ve made up my mind. In order to save myself from being destroyed by this sexual obsession, I’m going to Xia’s place tomorrow morning. It’s to spare myself the torment of seeing Ling Jishi, torment that has ensnared my life for too long already.

March 26

I left because of one involvement. But I got tangled up in another, so I had to rush back again. My second day at Xia’s place, Mengru arrived. Although she said she’d come to see somebody else, her arrival made me feel terrible. That night she expanded at great length on some new theory of emotions she’d picked up somewhere, taunting me covertly as I lay there in silence. To deny her any further satisfaction, I closed my eyes
and lay on Xia's bed until daybreak when, rage barely checked, I rushed home.

Yufang told me she’d found a place in the Western Hills and that she’d gotten hold of a good friend, also recuperating from illness, who’d stay with me. I should have been delighted by the news, but even though I forced a smile onto my face, I felt a cold mournfulness settling over me. Although I left home at an early age and have pretty much run wild since, I have always had a few friends or relatives close by. This time, even though I’m only going to the Western Hills, only a couple of miles from town, it will be the first time in my whole short life I’ve ever gone to a strange place by myself. If I were to die in those hills, who’d be the one to discover my corpse? Who can reassure me that I won’t die out there? Other people might smile and say I’m morbid, but I really did cry over this once before. When I asked Yufang if she would be able to let me go that far, she just laughed at my infantile question and said it was such a short distance that it was hardly a matter of being able or not. Finally Yufang promised me she’d come to the hills every week. Embarrassed, I dried my eyes.

That afternoon I went over to Weidi’s place and got him to promise he’d also come to the hills once a week, on a day Yufang wasn’t coming.

I got back home that night and began to pack desolately. As I thought about the Beijing friends I’m leaving behind, I started to cry. When it finally struck me that they had no intention of ever weeping over me, I brushed aside the tears running down my face. I’ll leave this ancient city alone.

I thought of Ling Jishi again, I was so lonely. Actually, that’s not entirely accurate. With Ling Jishi it’s not a matter of saying “I thought of him ... then I thought of him again.” Since I’d been thinking of him obsessively all day, it’s closer to the truth to say that I wanted “to talk about my Ling Jishi again.”

March 27

Yufang went to the Western Hills early this morning to get the room fixed up for me. She determined that I’d leave tomorrow. How can I repay her enormous kindness when I can’t even put my gratitude into words? I had thought initially of staying another day in the city, but now I just can’t force myself to say so.

Just when my anxiety over leaving so early was at its peak, Ling Jishi arrived. I grasped his hands tightly. “Sophia,” he said. “I haven’t seen you in days!”

How I longed to burst into tears and cling to him, weeping. My tears refused to flow. I was reduced to grinning. I did get a little consolation; on hearing that I’d be leaving tomorrow for the hills, he was so surprised that he was moved to sigh. My expression became more genuine. His grip tightened in response to my smile, so tight it hurt. “You’re smiling,” he said resentfully. “You’re smiling.”

The pain this caused him flooded me with a pleasure I’d never experienced before; it felt as though something had pierced my heart. Just as I was about to fall straight into his arms, Weidi arrived. Weidi knew I hated him for coming at that moment, but he wouldn’t leave. I gave Ling Jishi a sign with my eyes and said to him. “Don’t you have a class now?”

Then I escorted Ling out. He asked me when I was scheduled to leave the next morning. I told him. I asked him whether or not he was going to come back before then. He said he’d be back soon. I looked at him happily, forgetting how despicable his character is, and the mirage that is his beauty, because at that moment he was a storybook lover in my eyes.19 Hah! Sophia has a lover . . .

March 27, evening

I rushed Weidi out of here five hours ago. How can I describe those hours? Restlessly, in this cramped room, like an insect on a hot pan, I’ve sat, then stood, then rushed to the crack in the door to peer out. But . . . he isn’t coming. He just isn’t coming. Again I teetered on the edge of tears because my exit from Beijing has to be so desolate and lonely. In all Beijing will no one cry with me? I should just leave this cruel city. Why am I so loathe to renounce this hard board bed, the greasy desk, the three-legged chairs? . . . That’s it. I’m leaving tomorrow. My friends in Beijing will never be burdened with Sophia’s illness again. Why doesn’t Sophia do her friends a huge favor and die somewhere out in the Western Hills. They’re perfectly willing to let me go off to the hills lonely, desperate, friendless. On the other hand, presumably I won’t die and people won’t be harmed or unduly grieved . . . Oh, don’t worry it to death. Don’t think about it! What’s there to think about, anyway? If Sophia weren’t so needy that she ran around begging for an emotional fix, then she’d get some satisfaction from the looks of sympathy she does get, wouldn’t she? . . .

I have nothing further to say on the subject of friends. I only know that Sophia will never find satisfaction in ordinary friendship.

But what satisfaction can I ever expect? Ling Jishi promised he’d come. It’s already 9 P.M. Even if he does, will that make me happy? Can he give me what I need? . . .

I’ve even more reasons to hate myself now that it’s clear he’s not coming. In the far, far distant past, I knew how to adjust my style to suit the
man, but I've gotten quite moronic about that lately. Why did I give him such a supplicating look when I asked if he'd be back? In the case of such an attractive man, I should avoid being too candid, since he'll just despise me for it... But I love him. So why should I use technique? Can't I express my love directly? Anyway, providing that it harms no one, why shouldn't I be allowed to kiss him as many times as I want to?

He said that he was coming back, but he's broken his promise again, so it's clear he's only playing me along. You wouldn't lose anything, beloved friend, just by humoring Sophia a little on her way out of town.

I've gone insane tonight. How useless speech and the written word seem now! My heart heals as though it were being gnawed by tiny rats, as though a fire inside it were raging out of control. How I'd love to smash everything in sight. How I'd love to rush out into the night and run wildly in desperate confusion. I can't control the surges of madness. I lie on this bed of the thorns of passion. I turn this way and feel the stabs; I turn the other way only to be pierced again. I'm in a vat of oil listening to its roaring boil, feeling its burning heat sear my entire body... Why don't I run away? Because I linger over a vague and meaningless wish. God!... When I think of those red lips, I lose my mind again. If this wish could only come true. All alone, I can't restrain my own explosive laughter as I interrogate myself compulsively: "Do I love him?" Then I break into fresh gales of laughter. Sophia could never be such a fool as to allow herself to love that man from Singapore to such extremity. Is it possible that because I refuse to admit I love him I'll never be allowed to consummate this perfectly harmless relationship?

If he doesn't come tonight, how can I just leave complacently for the Western Hills?
Damn! 9:30!
9:40!

March 28, 3:00 A.M.

In the course of my life, my desire for people to understand and sympathize with me has been too strong, which is why I've felt such bitter despair for so long. Only I know how many tears I've shed.

Rather than calling this diary a record of my life, it's more accurate to regard it as the sum of all my tears. At least that's the way it feels. But now it's time to end the diary because Sophia doesn't need it anymore, doesn't need it as a vent or consolation, since now she understands that nothing has any meaning whatever and that tears are only the most elegant proof of that lack. Yet on this last page of the diary, I ought fervently to toast the fact that suddenly from the depth of disappointment I did achieve the satisfaction that should rightly have killed me with ecstasy. I...
plunged into the most profound anguish. Yet I now feel as though it’s been a mere trifle.

I don’t want to stay in Beijing. I’m even less interested in the Western Hills. I’ve decided to take a train south, somewhere where no one knows me, where I can squander the remaining days of my life. The agony is gone and I feel excitement. I laugh wildly, I feel so sorry for myself.

Life sneaks on. Death too. Oh, how pathetic you are Sophia!

_Translated by Tani E. Barlow_