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# *Miss Sophie's Diary*

**DING LING**



# His Hope and Other Stories

Ding Ling

Translated by W. J. F. Jenner



Panda Books

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Miss Sophie's Diary and Other Stories

DING Ling was born in 1904 in Linfeng, Hunan. In 1927, she published her first work "Meng Ke" which caught the attention of the literary world. In 1928, she produced her first story collection *In the Dark*.

In 1930 Ding Ling joined the progressive League of Left-wing Writers and became chief editor of its magazine *The Dipper*. From 1931 to 1933, she wrote many stories about the lives of workers and peasants. She was imprisoned by the Kuomintang government between 1933 and 1936. After her release, she became chief editor of the literary supplement to *Liberation Daily* and wrote "New Belief", "When I Was in Xia Village", "Night" and "Joining the Army".

From 1946 to 1948, Ding Ling completed her long novel *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*. A winner of the second Stalin Prize for Literature in 1951, it has now been translated into many languages.

Ding Ling is now deputy chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association and is currently writing her long novel *In the Coldest Days*.

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## Foreword

WHEN the editors of *Chinese Literature* told me that this volume of my short stories had been translated into English by W.J.F. Jenner and was about to go to the printer they expressed the hope that I would write something as a foreword to it. The invitation was one I was happy to accept as I wanted this chance of saying a few words to readers of English.

About seventy years ago, when I was ten, I went on from reading many of the classical Chinese novels to my first contacts with the literature of Western Europe. At the time I knew little about European history or geography, and even less about European politics, economics or society, but I was soon lost in the world of Dickens. I wandered through the streets of London with his earls, marquises, aunts, boys and girls. I experienced something of the fogs and the April showers, and shared both the warm and the hard lives of the characters in his books. Later my range extended to France and Germany, and I visited nineteenth-century Russia too. After the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Western European culture and thought was spread very widely in China, and people of my generation were eager to "learn from the West". I can say that if I had not been influenced by Western literature I would probably not have been able to write fiction, or at any rate not the kind of fiction included in this collection. It

is obvious that my earliest stories followed the path of Western realism, and not only in their forms: the thinking behind them was to some extent influenced by Western democracy. A little later, as the Chinese revolution developed, my fiction changed with the needs of the age and of the Chinese people. Its subject-matter, its characters and the life in them became Chinese. Yet in some pieces traces of European approaches can still be seen, especially in the stories from the 1920s and 1930s in this collection. That was why the translator of the French edition of these stories, Suzanne Bernard, said that the heroines of these stories, such as Sophie and Miss Tertia, would find friends abroad. I believe this may well be so. Literature ought to join minds together in this way, turning ignorance into mutual understanding. Time, place and institutions cannot separate it from the friends it wins. When I was most naive and living in the dark era of feudalism I was receptive to the literature of the rising bourgeoisie. And in 1957, a time of spiritual suffering for me, I found consolation in reading much Latin American and African literature. Now that my book is going to Europe and the rest of the world I hope that it will help to increase the understanding of China abroad and the friendship between peoples. This is why I wish to express my sincere thanks to the translator, Mr Jenner.

The eve of National Day, 1984

## Translator's Note

THE nine stories in this selection of Ding Ling's shorter fiction are printed in the approximate order of their writing. The selection is the author's own.

The earliest story, only the second Ding Ling published, is "Miss Sophie's Diary", which was written where it is set — in Beijing — in the winter of 1927-8. Soon after it was published in February 1928, making its author famous for the boldness with which it dealt with a young woman's sexual feelings, Ding Ling moved to Shanghai, where she was to live till she was seized by the authorities in 1933 and held under a kind of house arrest in Nanjing for three years. While in Shanghai she became much more committed to revolutionary politics than she had been before. The enthusiasm of a convert is apparent in "Shanghai in the Spring of 1930", written in October of that year. (There is a companion piece to this story in which the woman turns to revolution.) A reminder of the price that had to be paid for commitment is to be seen in "A Certain Night", her attempt at imaginatively reconstructing the last moments of the short life of her husband Hu Yepin, who like the unnamed hero of the story was machine-gunned to death in jail with other Communists and Leftists in February 1931. "From Night to Dawn", a story that is clearly autobiographical — its central

character is actually writing one of Ding Ling's own stories — is more realistic, showing her own struggle to keep going after the catastrophe by continuing to write without even the company of her baby to comfort her: the child, like Ding Ling and Hu Yepin's own, has been sent away to be looked after by his mother's family after his father's death.

It is against this background that the somewhat idyllic picture of a family of simple, honest and warm peasants in "The Hamlet", the story that the heroine of "From Night to Dawn" is writing, should be understood. The political excitement that Miss Tertia brings to the Tian Family Village in Ding Ling's native Hunan Province is the influence of the radical peasant movement that spread during the revolutionary years of 1926 and 1927. There is, however, no pastoral prettiness about the village life which the men in "Rushing" leave behind them in their desperate attempts to make their livings in Shanghai. This story, written in 1933, shows Shanghai having nothing to offer them either: those who succeed in walking the long way home to their village are the lucky ones.

"The Family Reunion" dates from 1936, the year in which Ding Ling's unofficial detention ended. It too shows rural life as hopeless, only this time the despair is that of a minor gentry family fallen on hard times.

Soon after this story was written Ding Ling made her way to northern Shaanxi, where the Communist Party was preparing to resist the coming Japanese invasion. After the war began in 1937 she threw herself into the work of making propaganda for resistance. By 1941, when she wrote the last two stories included here,

she was writing about the peasants of North China with a subtlety and perception that showed how much she had learnt from four years of living among them. "When I Was in Xia Village" is a work that deliberately avoids oversimplifications. There is no hiding the harshness of village morality that condemns a teenage girl who was first raped by the Japanese army and then stayed with them on Communist orders so as to gather information. It is not a story that calls for a straightforward emotional response by its readers in the way that much of her Shanghai and earlier wartime writing had. The self-righteousness combined with prurient curiosity of some of the village women who had not been raped or captured is hardly part of the usual propaganda picture of the peasantry.

The collection closes with another of Ding Ling's rural pieces, "Night". The village cadre broods over the difficulties he faces in his political work and longs to be rid of his ageing wife who will never bear him another child to replace the two who are dead. The promise of life and warmth offered by the woman next door has to be turned down for the sake of the cause. This is a much more realistic picture of a revolution in action than the naïveté of "Shanghai in the Spring of 1930".

Readers interested in finding out more about Ding Ling's writings would do well to consult Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker's *Ding Ling's Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). Ding Ling's novel *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*, translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, is published by the Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.

The translations in this book have been saved from

many errors by the careful checking of Yu Fanqin and other translators of the quarterly *Chinese Literature*. Responsibility for those that remain is mine.

W.J.F. Jenner  
Beijing-Leeds

# Miss Sophie's Diary

## 24 December

IT'S blowing again today. The wind woke me up before daybreak, then the attendant came in to light the stove. I knew that I'd never get back to sleep again, and that my head would start spinning if I didn't get up. If I lie there wrapped up in my quilt I brood too much on all those weird notions. The doctor says it would be better if I had plenty of sleep and plenty of food, didn't read and didn't think. But that's impossible. I never get to sleep before 2 or 3 a.m. and I wake up before dawn. Windy days like this make you think of too many disturbing things. Besides, you can't go out when it's blowing hard and what can you do stuck in your room with no books to read? I can't just sit here by myself doing nothing and waiting for the time to go by. I spend all day enduring and putting up with things and waiting for the time to go by, wishing the winter would pass quicker. Once it's warmer my cough is bound to get better. Then I'll be able to go south or to university, whichever I want. But this winter's too long.

I warmed my third drink of milk when the sun started shining on the window-paper. Yesterday I heated milk up four times. But though I warm it up so often I don't always drink it. It's a kind of exercise to build