

林白：貓的激情時代
The Time of Cat's Passion

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CAT'S EYES would always appear late at night outside my window, hovering, like flames or precious stones. She effortlessly floats through strange winding corridors like a mote of dust and drifts into my dreams.

In my dreams I always see her making a strange gesture, obscene and imposing—I don't understand what it means. In the room of my dreams she sits on an odd, high stool. In that otherwise utterly empty room there are only two such stools. One is round, as is the other, just like the two Jujube trees in Lu Xun's backyard.

She is wearing semi-transparent clothes, like pyjamas. Strangely, two large holes have been cut out of the chest area. This bizarre feature makes my heart start in terror. I become aware of something—somewhere in the gloom a crazed pervert is hiding. From the middle of the ceiling a beam of white light shines directly down onto Cat's body. She looks as though she has been placed inside a long transparent tube.

She is silent, motionless, her face pale.

Just as I remembered her at the execution ground.

I was there when Cat was executed; her father had died long ago and her mother had remarried and moved to faraway Xinjiang, and she had only an idiot younger brother. So it was left to me to claim the corpse. I had promised her to do so after the incident, before she turned herself in.

In my dream Cat uses her lithe, slender fingers to stroke my face. She lowers her body close to me, and in a whisper says: Do you know who I love the most?

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Cat's cool breath stirs the fine hair on my body, arousing a feeling of tender care. I say I don't know. She lowers her long eyelashes and says: You can imagine me as a man. I say that if you were one, I wouldn't have liked you.

Cat lies on my bed, her eyes like precious stones, black and lustrous, sparkling all over. Of all the girls I have ever known, I have never seen any with this kind of eyes. Eyes like that only appear in dreams or in movies.

Cat, staring at the ceiling, says: I will make you know! She stretches out a finger and lets it hang there in mid-air. It is strange and without reason that, even after she has long departed this world, I can still see and feel that finger.

She says: I will make you know! The one I love is you. The latter half of the utterance I saw in her eyes; Cat did not say it out loud. She often said only half her thoughts; from start to finish she was a shy girl. All she said was: I will make you know!

The potted touch-me-not plant under the bed gives off a strange odour at night, a little like the scent a ripe pomegranate puts forth. It is an unbearably sweet smell; so sweet that you think of only two words: decomposition and death.

Ordinary girls wouldn't keep this kind of plant inside the house. It is the kind of flower that ought to be placed at the doorway, or in the courtyard; it wants to see the sky and the dew; it is the kind of flower that blossoms from amongst the leaves, pale like moonlight, or bright like fresh blood. The colour oozes out onto a girl's long nails, shining with an enticing lustre.

Cat, because of her unique childhood experiences, had a fondness for the space under the bed. She said that no other place was as safe and peaceful. Ever since she was a child, she liked to gather together all of her precious things and put them under the bed. In my dream, I see the touch-me-not Cat put under the bed bloom into bizarre flowers, giant and bewitching, petals shaped like lips that open and shut, mumbling indistinct words.

I never understand what they are saying. I know that my mission in this life is to lay bare their secret.

This mission makes my head ache.

That night, as the smell of decomposition given off by the touch-me-not filled the air of our room, Cat walked from the bed to the front of the desk to put on makeup.

She said: I want my makeup to be like something out of a dream.

I asked her if she is going on a date. Her eyes sparkled alluringly for an instant, and she said she is going to look for my shop floor foreman. I said, all right, but he is an oaf, and won't appreciate your dreamy makeup; it would be better to wear more gaudy cosmetics.

Cat listened to what I said, and the humid room immediately filled with the smell of cheap cosmetics.

Cat had once said that, for me, she would consent to sleep with a man. At the time I had thought it was in jest, and as such I immediately and thoroughly forgot about it. Her alluring and mysterious smile made me feel as though I had just awakened from a dream. I realized, she is surely seeking my foreman in order to sleep with him. I had complained tearfully to Cat the day before—the factory was going to restructure, and the foreman was authorized to make hiring decisions. He had someone pass on a message to me that he might not keep me on, and every time I went to him, he did only two things. One was to pat my shoulder, and the other was to stroke the back of my hand; he said that he would take care of it, so I made no further efforts. Yesterday the hiring list came out, and I wasn't on it. According to the rules, I will get only 70 per cent of my wages for six months, and afterwards I will be on my own.

Cat said she wanted to go and find my foreman.

She put on heavy vulgar looking makeup.

Her eyes, alluring and mysterious.

She said you'd best wait for me at home, her voice as innocent as a dove's, cooing at me. She took off all her clothes, her breasts solid and firm, perfect as a Rodin sculpture. I wondered to myself why she was going to sleep with my foreman. My job was not worth her making this kind of sacrifice. I myself was not worth it. In everything I had always thought of myself before thinking of Cat.

I said, Cat, don't go.

Cat changed into the bra I had given her. She always treasured my gifts more than anything, but she didn't know the bra's hidden story, which was that I had originally bought it for myself. It was too big for me, so I gave it to her.

I said, Cat, don't go, you won't be happy sleeping with a man.

Cat slipped into a purple dress. The colour made her look resolute.

She said: You, wait, for, me, to, come, home.

Like a flash of purple lightning, she turned and in an instant was out of sight.

That evening, when the time came for it to get dark, it didn't; instead an unusual shade of dark yellow spread throughout the sky. It was a rare yellow glow, a kind of hue that seemed to have come from deep within time and from hell itself. It leaked through a crack in hell and filled the air, till every point between heaven and earth was suffused with the yellow glow.

I realized afterwards that this was the colour of an approaching rainstorm, but that night, the rain never came.

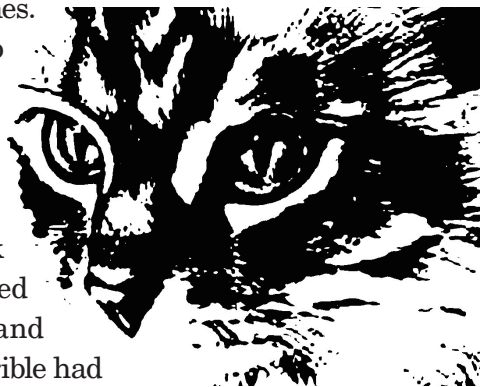
In Cat's small dark room I waited for her to come back. I could hear under the bed the touch-me-not flowers making a kind of wind chime sound, again and again, low and hesitant. From their graceful and melodious vibrations I

heard words that made my heart flutter. The touch-me-not petals were falling. Like Cat's nails they are full of sensibility, and from under the bed they floated up, falling one by one upon it. Cat's voice came falling down from the skylight, like arrows striking past my head.

It was very late at night when Cat came back.

Inside the room the overpowering sweet smell was so thick that it would not dissipate. I couldn't figure out whether this smell came from the touch-me-not or from Cat.

Cat's eyes were like flames or precious stones. It was the last night her flames burned so radiantly. She said: I am extremely tired, I want to lie down. I helped her take off her shoes, and felt something thick and sticky. I thought to myself, it definitely couldn't be anything else; its sweet rank odour coolly followed my fingers and climbed upwards, reaching straight into my body and internal organs. I understood; something terrible had happened.



I took off Cat's clothes, let her rest her head on the pillow. She had me hold her, her body shivering as though it were a chilly autumn day. She had me hold her close.

Cat said that it wasn't long before the foreman had her in bed, but even though he tried over and over again he couldn't enter her. He kept groping her, saying that he really did know what he was doing; but he tried everything and thought of every trick and still couldn't enter her. Breathing heavily, he said Cat wasn't sexy enough. Cat said, it's you who can't do it, so don't blame it on me not being sexy. The foreman said to Cat: Let's just forget about it this time, but I want you to come back again. His self-assurance and arrogance overwhelmed Cat.

And so Cat did that frightful thing.

Cat, your corpse is my corpse. Last night we were incinerated together into blue smoke, so let me use the language of the smoke to tell you: The one I love is you. My words, overflowing with fragrance, are all dedicated to you.