

袁瓊瓊：貓

Cat

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By Tang Jinteng

“MY CAT, if I’m around, so is he. I have only him, and he has only me.”

That’s the way she always talked, her voice low, with a lethargic drawl and an affected languor. He had his back to her, but he could easily picture her expression: head raised, face framed in black shoulder-length hair, eyelids drooping slightly. She was saying, “I live in such, a big house, all alone. Except for, my cat, that is.” So gentle, so soft. She breathed a long sigh. “Ah, my Blue.”

She called all her cats “Blue”. Who knows which generation of Blue this was. He had once been so captivated by the throaty, clipped way she spoke that his heart nearly melted. All the men who spoke with her reacted in more or less the same way: cautious, respectful, in a muted tone that they felt was dignified. “I’ve never liked cats. They’re, too much like women.”

“Oh?” She responded, teasing, surprised. “Like, me?”

At this point in the conversation his patience wore out. He walked over to a corner of the room, keeping his back to her until he got there. When he turned around, she looked just as he had pictured her. She was still beautiful, her petite, slim figure giving the impression of a classic fragile beauty. She was having an

individual art exhibition, and everyone knew that her physical beauty was half the reason her paintings were causing such a sensation.

The man was young, no more than twenty-five. Young and innocent. He probably knew nothing about cats, and nothing about women.

They had lived together for a while. He didn't much like pets, but he and Blue had gotten along just fine. It was a fat little thing, plump and furry, so in the winter he'd put it on his lap to stay warm. Eventually Blue came to like him, which made her jealous. She had said the cat acted as though it were his.

She turned around while she was talking and spotted him. She fixed her eyes on him from way across the room and smiled touchingly at him. She was up to her old tricks, and he was somewhat upset with himself for still finding them irresistible. She walked up to him and said, "You never come, to my house." Her throaty voice was as seductive as ever. "All alone. Still." A series of high-pitched laughs followed.

Instead of responding, he just smiled politely. A moment later he asked, "How's Blue?"

"Um." Her eyes brightened. "This time, it's a, Siamese. Really blue. Its eyes."

She truly seemed to have forgotten. It gave him a strange feeling.

He could never forget. When he came home that day, Blue was lying dead on his table, a wire coiled around its neck three times. No one would ever believe that those two hands gesturing in front of him, so tiny and delicate, had such strength.

"I see!" he said, at a loss for words.

She was calmly talking about the cat she had now. He observed the innocent, contented look on her face.

He guessed he didn't understand women either.