

## Cat Feeding

1.

There is a bulletin board next to the front gate of my neighborhood. On the board, there are a lot of traces showing colorful fliers being stuck on and pulled off. The leaflets are mainly about announcements like pest control, water cuts, community services, etc. There are also ads for households care and foreign language learning.

In the lower right corner of the bulletin board, I saw a gray card in postcard size with dark green handwriting on it: I will take a long-term business trip, looking for caring people paid to feed my cat. Anyone interested can add my WeChat account: li-zhun0812.

Why can't this person ask for a friend's help or send the cat to a pet store? Is this person friendless? I wondered. I haven't seen people using handwriting for a long time, especially pretty good handwriting, in the social trend of printing and typing. I tried to spell the name of this person: Zhun Li. And I guess 0812 is probably the birthday.

All-day long, this WeChat ID was playing over in my head. At the end of my freshman year, it didn't seem too bad if I could find a part-time job in the long summer vacation, especially when the work is in my cozy neighborhood. Finally, I added the account mentioned in that gray card and saw the avatar with a man's shadow on the ground. I tried to explore more from his posts, but his homepage was empty, with a three-days visibility limit.

"Hello, I saw your AD for someone to feed your cat."

"Yes, I am not in China from June 20th to August 8th. I need someone to help feed my cat every day."

"I live in room 802, the third department of this neighborhood. My name is Shiyu Pan.

Which building are you in? Do you have any specific demands for this work? "

"I am in room 2301, the fourth department. My name is Zhun Li. You have to have the experience of owning a cat. You have to go to my house at a certain time every day to shoot a little video of my cat for me."

I was secretly pleased to have guessed his name correctly.

"Then, the payment is... "

"A hundred yuan a day, I'll pay you in total when I come back."

"When is the interview?"

"No need, send me your telephone number and a shot of your ID card, then I'll give you the password of my apartment. You can go there directly. My cat's name is Curl, and she's very gentle."

What a weirdo. Will he be dangerous. I thought to myself.

But he is the owner who invites a stranger to his apartment. And I only have to go there once a day for a considerable amount of wage. I thought it wouldn't be a big deal.

2.

On that day, I asked Becca, my high school best friend, to go with me.

It was a large house, measuring over 200 square meters — a pretty clean but empty one. There was hardly any furniture except a black leather sofa. Under the feet, it was pale hardwood floors, and wasabi green wallpaper spread around. In the corner of his living room, I saw an upright piano in the old style. Becca went over to open the cover and hit some keys with her right index finger. The piano made a bright and warm sound.

"It seems quite expensive."

"Be careful." I whispered to check her recklessness.

The other wall is full of bookshelves. Becca walked over and took a quick look. "The owner has a great taste," she said. "They are all classic books."

"Where is the cat?" I asked.

We looked around for the cat. The doors of the three rooms were locked, and at the end of one hallway, there were two large bags of cat food, a whole box of cat cans, and two small white China bowls. I put cat food in one bowl and water in the other, then called softly, "little Curl, come and eat."

I saw little movement behind the curtains and found a black kitten tucked away in a corner with her ears bent behind its head, clearly nervous. She had curly white hair in the middle of her forehead, which looked a little funny. I lead her to the bowl with food, gently stroked its back, opened WeChat, and shot a video of eating Curl to her owner.

He replied with "thank you," and a smiley emoji. My work was done that day.

The next day, I went to his house at the same time, the little one has already squatted in the doorway waiting for me. "Hi kitty, good to see you again."

Little Curl greeted back to me with a meow.

I prepared the food for Curl as I had done yesterday, and then went to the bathroom to clean the cat's excrement. Besides a white soapbox, there was a bottle of foreign perfume which I didn't know the brand. When I opened the cap of the bottle and pressed, the air was instantly filled with the odor of cedar and sandalwood, apparently a male perfume. Opening the mirror ark, I saw ten soaps of the same brand were arranged in sequence neatly, also cedar and rose flavor. Next to the sink was a man's white shirt. It was cotton and new, white with water stains

on the collar. I didn't want the shirt to fall on the floor and get dirty, so I folded it and put it on the towel rack. When folding, I found that the fabric of this shirt had dark lines of diagonal weave, which was very comfortable to touch, and the cuffs were embroidered with LZ initials, the abbreviation of the owner's name.

In the following days, I fed the cat at the same time every day, sometimes lying on the sofa for a while with a book chosen from his shelf. Curl had already become familiar with me, snuggled in my arms to accompany me with reading books, and snoring. I stroked the cat and opened one book randomly named Biography of Strauss. A piece of paper fluttered to the floor. I picked it up and recognized it as a black and white photo. The photo showed a pair of slender hands playing on piano keys. Turn to the back, and there was a line written in green ink - In Vienna. The handwriting was the same as the one on the bulletin board.

Well, he could be a pianist or a musician. I looked carefully at the hands in the photo. They looked like the wings of a white dove, gentle but powerful. All of a sudden, I began to wonder about his face. There were no photographs, no portraits, or anything that shows his appearance in the room. What kind of man is he?

3.

Soon, Curl regarded me as her friend. She tended to hug my legs when I was walking or even lie on my keyboard when I was typing. I sent Li short videos about Curl every day, and he said thanks to me politely.

There was one time when he saw a video about small Curl hugging one of my feet while sleeping, and I put my hands on her belly, he replied: "lovely, you two."

At that moment, I felt a sharp contraction of my heart and a slight burn in my face.

I tried to get to know him better and started to chat with him more often. "Little Curl is so cute. Why don't you ask your friends or relatives to help you look after her?"

"I don't like to bother people."

"But why do you trust me?"

"I believe in fate."

Time passed quickly, in my daily visits to his house with his cat and occasional conversations with him. Soon it would be time for Li to come back. I've learned about him well from his apartment. He loved western classics, read Shakespeare's sonnets, was interested in Buddhism and philosophy, sometimes read detective stories, and had postcards from friends all over the world that he kept as bookmarks in his books. He might have been a bit of a neat freak. Every one of his books was clean, with no folds or edges, and even early editions were well preserved.

The day before he came back, I decided to clean the room to show my upbringing. I cleaned off the cat hair on the floor, wiped the piano with a soft cloth, and put the folded white shirt on the piano case. After cleaning, I sat on the floor and stared at Curl. When I left, I put my slippers in order and took a picture of the whole apartment, then sent it to Li.

After a while, he responded: "I bring you a gift. I'll give you when I'm back."

Suddenly my heart beat faster, and I ran to the balcony for a breath. What am I expecting? It's crazy. Although I've portrayed Li well, we don't even know each other. I couldn't help laughing at myself.

On August 8th, the last day of my work, I closed the door of his house after finishing all the stuff, took an in-depth look at the door sign, and sent him a photo of his front door. This time,

it wasn't until 10 pm that he sent back the message: "I just got off the plane. Back home now.

Thank you for your help."

I received the money transfer from him, a little more than our agreed salary, rounded up. On the third day, August 12th, I received an express. It was the same bottle of rose perfume I had seen in his bathroom. And there was a handwritten card with the perfume, written in black ink, "Thank you, an angel in my life. -- Zhun Li ".

I was going to faint. The rosy smell surrounded me all day, and I was like walking on clouds. August 12th might be his birthday, but I had no way to confirm. Until after 12 o'clock, I ultimately failed to send him a birthday message.

4.

I only had two crushes in my life.

Being typically a good student in school, I was the kind who could complete the assignment of each subject with high quality, and always act as planner and leader of activities on campus. Busy with study, I also neglected to dress up, basically wearing plain face and ponytail every day. I had a relatively dark skin with short and plain figure, not enough to be called a beauty. Only when smiling, there was a pair of dimples on my cheeks, occasionally made me praised as temperament and good-looking by others.

When I was in junior high school, I had a secret crush on my new deskmate in the new school that I transferred to. He talked slowly and acted gently, had a super clear and three-dimensional features that inherited from his father. Smiling like me, he had a shallow pear vortex on the side of his face. Probably because of the frequent interactions brought by close distance, I gradually began to write about him in my diary, pay attention to each of his tiny

movements, feel both jealous and sad when seeing him intimate with other girls. A lot of our friends thought we could become a couple, but until the graduation of junior high school, I did not express my crush, probably owing to the pride of being a top student. Also, I didn't get his confession. I thought to myself that he could be kind to me just purely out of the care of the newcomers. Later, we went to different high schools and gradually lost touch with each other. Until one night before I went abroad, I met him downstairs in my apartment. He handed over a confession that was six years late, but I no longer felt a heartbeat for him. Anyway, it was a perfect ending for the secret love with vigor and vitality in my adolescence.

The second time I fell in love was when I got to know a boy in a high school activities. He was a very dazzling person with excellent grades and outstanding appearance. His unruly and rakish temperament attracted me a lot. Together, we could discuss a lot of profound topics in an unconstrained way. He was good at science, so to make up for my weaknesses. And I was a literature lover, and could also help him with his struggles. He was very considerate and careful, occasionally acted like a child, more often like a father to take care of me as his daughter. He would give me seat pillows as a gift rather than flowers, which he called impractical and tacky. My good friend Becca said he was a reliable guy and even suitable for marriage.

Just as I was planning about the future with him, he had to move to another city because of a change in his dad's work. We still tried to maintain an intimate relationship through social networks. However, there were less and less common topics between us due to our increasingly heavy study and parallel lives. He wanted to get into top universities in China, but my target was professional colleges abroad. He gradually failed to reply to my messages in time and never came back to my city. He said he was afraid that our interactions could affect his academic grades, so I stopped bothering him. Until he finished the Chinese college entrance examination,

during that long summer vacation, I cautiously sent him a greeting, expected for a satisfying consequence of our story. I still liked him after all.

He responded a month later, said he had one thing to tell, which he hoped I wouldn't get angry with.

He said he came out.

Then he apologized a lot, proving how he sincerely liked me before, like he even planned to wait until I'm back from college abroad. However, he could not feel at ease in a relationship without a close companionship. By coincidence, a boy appeared, who brought him a lot of joys and comforts.

I listened to him in silence, not knowing exactly should I smile or cry. Then at the end of the phone call, I heard him asking if we could still be friends. I agreed with a soft heart; in fact, I originally planned a farewell for him.

I hung up and texted Becca: "I am removed from pending area to the elimination."

That night, when I got drunk for the first time, I begged him for sparing one last night chatting with me about all those old days we had. He refused. He said he was not drunk like me. And he went to bed. I froze on this side of the screen for a long time, then deleted him from my contact list, silently, neatly and precisely.

Since then, I rarely believe in others' promises and no longer easily fall in love. Except for the male students that have the same classes as me, I hardly have close contact with other members of the opposite sex.



Li never texted me again. A familiar sense of loss came over me, and I was too afraid to re-experience it. I opened his homepage again and again to check, but never saw his posts. I looked at the black shadow in his avatar, felt myself falling into the same whirlpool as before, deeper and deeper.

After that, I spent a regular time everyday walking in the neighborhood with my cell phone in hand. I was eager to go upstairs whenever I passed by Li's apartment. But I was no longer the adolescent girl with hormone impulse; I didn't want to see his face surprised open the door. That would make me embarrassed.

When taking a walk, I would always see a young man in around mid-20s, dressed in a white hoodie and casual jeans, with a thin face and a neat haircut. He wore a pair of all-inclusive earphones all day long, and listened to something immersively. He seemed not to want to be interrupted. I noticed that his fingers holding on the earpiece were long, like the wings of a white dove.

He was too concentrated to notice me, even if I deliberately followed him. I could almost say that he was Li. He was a good-looking man with melancholy eyes and a high nose. He looks artistic with all-day music around, and always walks in a decent temperament.

He smelled like the perfume I had breathed in Li's house.

It was him. I felt like it was him.

One day, I intentionally walked towards him. He finally saw me and nodded slightly to me. I felt as if he recognized me. I could almost hear my heart thumping. My throat tightened, and my breath became blocked. The wind blew in as I walked past him, and the smell grew stronger. I almost called out his name, but I held back. It was crazy. I had to try to be sane in front of him.

It would be so exciting if he could recognize me. But he didn't message me. Why didn't he message me? Was he trying not to recognize me on purpose because I was too insignificant? But it doesn't require to think that much to be normal friends, and neighbors more or less have reasons to keep in touch. I could still occasionally visit Curl. I thought to myself.

Right, Curl, I haven't seen her for a long time. Was she doing good? I thought I'd better buy some snacks to see her so that knocking on Li's door won't seem too presumptuous. After all, I once took care of Curl for an extended period, and it was reasonable to miss her.

6.

After two days of psychological construction, I finally prepared the courage to visit Li. I put on the dress that I thought was most charming, wore a pair of shoes with heels, and a necklace my mother gave me on my coming-to-age ceremony. I let my hair down and put on a little makeup. I chose a white paper bag to carry fish fillets and other snacks that I bought from the pet store outside my neighborhood, and tied a bow with a red ribbon on the bag.

Standing in front of the elevator downstairs Li's house, I tried to straighten-up my back and raised my head a little. While waiting, I saw myself through the reflection of the elevator door. Although I was not a particularly bright beauty, I looked pleasant and graceful. I felt a little embarrassed and looked down at my shoes.

All of a sudden, I caught a whiff of cedar and sandalwood. A man was standing behind me, waiting for the same elevator. I refrained my excitement and looked up to pretend to look at the numbers of floors shown on the elevator, carefully glancing at the figure printed on the door.

No, no, no, it wasn't him.

It was a senior man around fifty years old, with thin hair and a bleak face. The flesh of his cheeks slightly drooped, and his hands were folded on his apparently protruding belly.

The elevator arrived. The man and I got into the elevator. He was a tenth of a second faster than I was, and pressed on the 23rd floor. I almost touched his finger. As soon as I pulled my finger back, I noticed that the sleeve of his shirt had a dark diagonal line, embroidered with two capital letters: LZ

I quickly pressed the button for the fifth floor and kept my head down. The second the elevator stopped to open the door, I almost ran out of the elevator as fast as I could and headed for the staircase.

In the dim light of the staircase, I breathed like a fish stranded on the shore.