

Jungle cat

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QUELLA NOTTE

I hurried from the cornfield, perplexed yet strangely wild.
and ran along the quiet lanes, as I did when once a child.
You went your way and I went mine, beneath the flickering stars.
The only other lights we'd seen had been some passing cars.
An hour we'd lain in each other's arms, naked 'neath the moon.
The night was warm and passionate, Oh lovely month of June.
I reached my home with beating heart and trembled by the gate.
The time was well past midnight's hour, I'd never been so late.
I lay in bed and hated you and then began to cry.
But they were tears of happiness, I felt content to die.
I tasted doubt upon my lips, a taste both sweet and sour.
and in my mind relived again the love we'd made that hour.

D. A. Johnstone

JUNGLE CAT

The young man who came in the door was not what I expected. Usually, when Mike sent one over from the gym, they were somewhat run-of-the-mill. This one was not. He was no taller than I, and I am average; but there the likeness came to an end.

«You'll like Angelo,» Mike had said over the phone. «He's from Puerto Rico.»

«How much?» I asked.

Mike told me. Then he said, «He's got a pachuco mark on his inner right calf. Had it on since he was a kid. Wants it off. Think you can do it?»

«Hardly,» I said. «That's a doctor's work. I can put another design over it.»

«Nope,» Mike said. «He doesn't want that. He's a weightlifter, and you lose points if you have tattoodles. But you can talk to him about it.»

«Okay,» I said, and Mike hung up.

And sure enough, within twenty minutes Angelo was there. He stood rather tentatively in the shop, near the door. I looked him over quickly—and rather excitedly, my eyes tumbling happily up and down the crests and troughs of his blue-black hair, and noting the careless little lock so carefully arranged to hang down on his somewhat low forehead. His lashes hardly belonged to a man's face, they were so long and black; and beneath them intense dark eyes looked just as thoroughly at me as mine at him. There were good male planes in his cheeks, and the skin stretched over them firmly. And what skin! Clear and unblemished, and tawny with the residue of the Caribbean sun left underneath it, with a darker red on the cheekbones where the summer sun had rested with contented familiarity, recognizing one of its own.

But it was the eyebrows that caught and held me. They grew in a straight and heavy line clear across the bridge of his nose, dipping slightly downward at the middle. They were the sort of thing that arrests the eye without at once

relaying to the mind the source of the great attractiveness. They were calm, but with a sense of mobility in them. Fascinated, I watched as one of the dark lines shot up like a startled bird from cover, and then he moved towards me with an outstretched hand.

«My name's Angelo,» he said, and I shook his hand. The grasp was strong. «Mike sent me over.»

I let out my breath so that he heard me. He looked a bit surprised. «Something wrong?»

«No,» I said, «nothing at all. Mike's sent over several, but scarcely anything like this up to now.»

He grinned—a startling effect, with his teeth so white against the dark of his skin. «Aw,» he said sardonically, «I bet you say that to all the boys.»

«No,» said I, «first time today.»

And the small inconsequential talk went on for a few minutes—a kind of investigative nuzzling of each other, much like two dogs meeting for the first time, to find out if they can be friends, lovers, or just ordinary airedales together. He had come from Puerto Rico when he was fourteen, gone to school and graduated, played the drums and sung with a small combo; he wanted to write music, had no steady girl friend, and had never heard of Sibelius. He pulled up his trousers on a strong young leg, covered with fine black hair, to show me the deep scarred cross of his pachuco mark with three rays tattooed into his skin.

I shook my head. «Probably have to have a skin graft over it since it's more than three years old,» I said. «And that would mean another piece of skin off your butt. Mike said you didn't want another design to cover it. A black panther would, maybe.» He reminded me of one.

«No,» he said, «Guess not.» He pulled his trouser leg down. His slacks were dark, and he wore a light checked windbreaker over a bright red nylon tee-shirt. The red was another skin; his handsome pectoral muscles swelled beneath the scarlet of the fabric. I noticed that his pants were pegged to a narrow band at the ankles, and his shoes looked vaguely Italian; where in the world did these Puerto Rican boys get their odd clothes? But strangely—whether it was the overwhelming force of his dark handsomeness, or his personality, or my momentary breathlessness at the sight of him—Angelo, I thought, looked good in them.

Getting over the hurdle of the first few moments with these young men who sell themselves is always a little embarrassing for me. The moment of silence prolonged itself, until I said somewhat nervously, «Well, shall we . . . er . . . retire to the back room?» **How banal, how trite!**

«Sure,» he said, «whenever you want.»

My mouth was dry as I went to the front door, and stuck in the edge of it a small sign saying: «Out to Eat; Back in 20 Minutes.» For a moment, I glimpsed the fragile span of the Bay bridge glittering in the afternoon sun, and unaccountably winked at it. Then I locked the door and followed him into the back room, drawing the curtains together. In the shabby old storeroom with the bed, bench, and desk, the high ceiling and the boxes piled everywhere—well, it was an unhappy contrast to love under the blue and golden skies of Greece, or on the white sands of Italy. I arranged the desk lamp to hide my defects and to illuminate him. And then my hesitations drowned themselves in his youth and firmness, and we might as well have been together—and alone—on the isles beneath the wind, with the warm dark night around us, and the ice-cold moon above.

*

Who can say at what moment love begins, or when it ends? Indeed, who can say of what it is compounded? It is said that it sometimes comes swiftly upon one, like a plague, consuming and devouring, and turning the mind and body black with its fires; and it is also said that at others its approach is soft and gentle, unperceived, slow and unfelt. I was under no illusions with Angelo. He would call, come, and collect—and the fact that he often hung around the shop afterwards did not make me think he found a father-image in me, nor that his lively black eyes even really saw me—or if they did, it was through a shimmering veil composed of dollar signs and tidy entries in a bank book.

But hang around he did. He would sit singing by hours—thumping an old wooden box in lieu of his bongo drums, singing in a husky though fairly able baritone all of the collection of modern songs, especially the rock 'n' roll of which he was very fond, though listening to them nearly killed me. Or he would sit combing his glossy hair in front of the mirror, chair tilted back and comb busy, until his fingers helped his hair to find its proper and pleasing wave—and then with a small flick, he would twist his forelock until it fell just right down towards those incredible eyebrows.

«You ever shave between your eyebrows and you needn't come around here any more,» I said to him time and again. And he would grin.

In those first excited and exciting contacts of ours, I came to know his body as well as a sculptor knows his marble. It was really magnificent, and he was proud as a peacock of it. He liked to pose naked in front of the full-length mirror. His shoulders were practically one-and-a-half to the ratio of his hips' one-half; there were four strong ridges in his abdomen, and he loved to draw his arm down to the side, tensing it so that his tricep leaped into a golden mountain. At the base of his spine, some fine small body hair drew inwards toward the column in an even pattern, as if a strong wind had blown it so, or water washed over it.

Little by little he learned to forsake the horrid passivity he had at first, when—with eyes closed and forearm flung across them—he dreamed of something else instead of what was going on. To tell the truth, he didn't like the idea of any of it at all. But he took to my suggestions quickly (after all, who was paying?) and even too enthusiastically, so that often—criss-crossed and sweating—I had to beg him to stop. He hated people like me—you could tell that by the enthusiasm of his violence—but he had to live. And this was an easier way to make money than to work. You made more quicker.

He was moody and mercurial, as most Latins are; and when he was angry, you could almost see the inch-long lightnings flash from his eyes. One day he came into the shop, very cross. It was hard to find out what was wrong. Finally it began to come out.

«Had a fight with my uncle,» he said. «Carlo.» He didn't look at me, but at the floor.

«Why?» I asked. «What about?»

«Nuthin',» he said.

I did not like Carlo at all. Although he was Angelo's uncle, he was not many years older. He sometimes came with Angelo into the shop, and his whole attitude was too protective, too much like that of a mother-hen or a Methodist aunt. I disliked his quick and darting eyes, his mean little way, and the fact that he spoke such broken English that I could barely understand him, whereas Angelo spoke perfect West Coast.

«Carlo kept me from going to a dance,» he said.

«What the hell right has he to do that?» I asked.

Angelo shifted uneasily. «None,» he muttered.

Oh, it was hard work to get that story, but I got it. And when I did, I wished that I had never heard it. For Carlo, like an evil genius, had started on Angelo when the kid had been at the most critical formative period of his life—keeping him from dating girls, watching him, being with him all the time, conditioning him—getting the sensitive young boy under obligations to him, playing upon his compassion (for Carlo had a bad kidney, having been in the Korean war), and then trading upon the pity which Angelo felt for him. 'First a little, thence to more'—and ending by his crawling into Angelo's bed at night to offer him a poor substitute for what he had kept him from enjoying because of his jealousy; until finally—behold the finished product: Angelo Trilby to Carlo's Svengali. Angelo could hardly move without consulting him. And night after night: «Please, Angelo—I come to you tonight?» «No.» «Oh, please—it give me such a headache when you not let me.» And after a moment: «All right then, come on, but make it quick.» And I could see the two of them, with Angelo biting his knuckle and staring up into the dark of the little room, hating Carlo for insisting, yet pitying him for his weakness and his illness...

«But how in the world can Carlo stand for letting you go with all these other men? Isn't he jealous of them?»

«Oh, that's different,» Angelo said. «He—he knows they don't mean anything.» He paused, and scuffed his shoe on the floor. «I'm sorry,» he muttered, for I was one of 'them'. «Besides, he's so much in debt I have to help him all I can.»

«You give him part of the money you earn this way?»

«Sure,» he said. «Most of it.»

«Goddamn,» I said, very irritated.

I suppose there are three kinds of love. There is the instinctual, which the young animal feels for its mother when it runs to her, frightened by a noise in the forest. And then there is the sensory or emotional kind, with or without overtones, that you feel when—humped like a goat or bleating in animal rut—you place within your partner the cause of your tension. And finally there is what might be called conscious love—a kind of objective wish for the happiness of the loved one, purchased for him at no matter what price, even at that of losing him. I believe it was this kind of feeling somewhere within which led me into a deep but transient melancholy, as I realized what should be done.

«Angelo,» I said, leaning a little forward. «Tell me—have you ever been with a girl?»

He did not answer, but with head turned down, he shook his negative response.

«Even at your age,» I murmured, hardly knowing what to do. I had long ago given up mixing in people's lives; there was no reward in it, and the results were often disturbing. At present, whenever anyone came to me for advice, even though I saw the answer clearly, I would not give it. It is only a step from such reluctance, however well motivated, to the selfish view: *you* worked hard and found the answers to your problems after painful suffering; now let *him* find them the same way. But here I felt that there might be some reason to interfere, for Carlo was older, and Angelo as yet hardly knew what had happened to him—or would happen, if this went on.

I thought a bit about it, and then uncrossed my knees.

«We've got to get you a girl,» I said at last, even though it was an opening of the window, to let the black love-bird fly away.

*

There were certain mechanical difficulties attached to such a project. Angelo had worked here and there, but he was like most young men of the present day: he wanted to begin at the top. And having no skills, he was always put into a position that he felt was below him, so that after two or three weeks he would find an excuse to quit. Besides, there was also in him a corrosion of the will, a weakening of ambition, for he kept thinking that he had to work all that time to make as much as he often might in twenty minutes, with the right man. But during his sessions with the eight-hour day, he had met some young girls in offices, and he knew others from his school days, many of whom had fallen under the magic of his darkly romantic looks. Thus finding one was no problem, but where would he take her?

«Can I use your apartment, huh, can I?» he wheedled in his most cajoling way.

«Hardly,» I said. «It's a respectable place in a respectable building, and across the way lives an old maid who has very large ears. What would she think to hear such goings-on coming from my apartment? And besides, she still believes I'm an ex-newspaper drama and music critic, because I was when I moved in there.»

«Then where?» said Angelo.

«We'll find a place.» He could have used the apartment, had he taken the girl there in the afternoon, but most of the willing ones were working during the day. If the truth has to be told, it is that I looked with distaste on the idea of her there with him for that. I saw the mess that they would leave, the drinks and juices spilled. At least that is what I told myself, but I presume the real reason lay in my subconscious, and I was too ashamed of it to ferret it out.

It was arranged satisfactorily. We borrowed a friend's place, who was only too happy—having a small case on Angelo himself—to let himself dream of what happened on his bed. And late that evening Angelo came to the shop again.

«Well,» I said, «how did it go?»

His whole face was luminous, and his eyes sparkled. He nodded quickly, grinning. «Wonderful,» he said. «We're gonna have a return engagement.»

I said sourly, «You'll probably knock her up and then things'll be more complicated than before.»

«Oh, no,» he said, «not a chance.»

«You gonna tell Carlo?» I asked.

He looked thoughtful. «Of course,» he said, «ain't that why we fixed it? And yet—» he paused, «I kinda hate to hurt him.»

«Oh, lord,» I groaned. The boy was such a curious mixture—with his intense pride, his loathing for being 'owned', and yet his reluctance to hurt his Svengali. Every man, presumably, develops an affection for the harness—tamed by circumstances and his passage through life, just as wild horses are.

*

Little by little, as the months wore on into a year, Angelo weaned himself away from Carlo. His uncle no longer called me at the shop three or four times a day to ask where Angelo was. And my conscience still troubled me about my selfishness in not lending him my apartment, so that when Angelo wanted to buy a car, I 'lent' him the money for a down payment. To be sure, he paid me back, but hardly in a coin with which one could buy groceries.

There were one or two violent scenes in my shop, when Carlo followed Angelo down to see me. The rapid Spanish was too much for me, but I caught the words 'mamador' and 'no me jolas' flung around in fury. Carlo once threw himself on the bed in the backroom and wept, and once Angelo hit him in the kidney, so that there was blood for days thereafter. And through it all I watched with as much calm detachment as I could, feeling very slimy myself, for I had begun to suspect that my motives were not so pure as I had thought them at first. Perhaps it was not that I wanted to save Angelo from the ache and struggle of being one of us so much as it was my dirty resolve that if I could not have him for my own (and no man could), then Carlo wasn't going to have him either.

And finally Angelo's father began to suspect the truth. In a characteristic Latin reaction he suggested only that Carlo move out of the house and get his own apartment, and that was all there was to it—no threats of prosecution, no violence—just a Puerto Rican acknowledgment of a fact, and a small gesture made about it.

We felt that we had won.

Things should have calmed down a little after that, but life with Angelo was always stormy. His rages were unpredictable, and my own temper was often short. Although he was scrupulously honest, in that he never stole anything, as we grew to know each other better, he began to take for granted that what was mine was his. He was one of the 'gimme' boys—«Gimme this, gimme that;» and usually I gave it to him, if not at first then later.

But living on the brink of a volcano is always a little exciting, and my shop was at the edge of Vesuvius. Sometimes there was a sudden explosion.

The matter of the combs, for instance.

Angelo couldn't keep a comb, or a cigarette lighter, for more than a week. Heaven knows what he did with them, but they were always disappearing. In my shop I always kept an extra one, for those days when I left mine on the dresser-top at home. I liked a little all-steel Swedish comb. Angelo's eyes lit up when he saw the first one.

«Gimme it, will you?»

«Oh, all right,» I said; «you'll just lose it.»

«No, I won't,» he said.

«You're just like a magpie,» I said. «If you see something shiny, you've got to have it.»

Three days later, he opened the drawer and put my second newly-purchased reserve comb in his pocket again, grinning at me.

«So you did lose it,» I said. «They cost a dollar.»

He laughed. And then a few days later, it happened again. «Listen,» I said, «I don't mind the buck so much, but I hate like hell to be running over to buy another one every time I turn around.»

«Buy 'em by the dozen,» he laughed. «Besides, the exercise is good for you.»

It went on happening. On the seventh or eighth time, when he reached for the comb in the drawer, I got up and went to him and without a word took it from his hand and put it into my pocket. He was so surprised at the gesture that he did not hold on to it. Then he recovered.

«C'mon,» he said, «gimme it. I promise I'll never lose another one.»

«Nonsense,» I said.

From out of the west the storm arrived. There was no herald, no thunder, no dark cloud. One moment he was smiling, and the next—his brows drew down and together and his lips tightened into a snarl, and the little lightnings flashed from his eyes.

«You mean you're not gonna give me that goddamned lousy comb?»

«No,» I said, more calmly than I felt.

He took a handful of change out of his pocket and flung it straight down on the floor. It scattered in every direction, and one nickel rolled under the stove. «There!» he said. «There's some money for your goddamned combs!» In a rage, he strode to the clothes closet, opened the door, and yanked down a sports coat and shirt that he had left hanging there, and threw them over his arm. «I'm gettin' out!» he snarled. «You can keep your lousy combs from now on!»

«Angelo—» I began, baffled. There was nothing I could think of to stop the progress of the tornado.

«Goodbye!» he shouted, and went out the door. He tried to slam it, but the heavy doorcheck spoiled his dramatic exit. I stood there trembling, torn. He'll be back, I thought to myself; he needs the money. And then I remembered his pride, and his dozens of other clients. Oh, well—you'll save some money, I thought. But you'll miss him.

I need not have worried too much. He came in the next day and sat down. «I can't apologize,» he said. «I ain't made that way. But here I am.»

I looked at him. «You'll bust a blood vessel some day if you keep that up.» And then it was all over.

*

The body of a man is the most beautiful creation in the world. Nothing can compare with it. There is no sculptor since the beginning of time who has not praised it above the female form. And the body of Angelo was perfect. I sometimes tired of him, but never of watching his body. In movement or repose, it was flawless as a Chinese poem, as a sonnet by Keats, a concerto by Vivaldi. When he was active, moving his arms or legs—his muscles flickered into excited life. To see him pick up a book, and watch the counterpoint of their turnings against each other, was like listening to a harp arpeggio; to see him bend to tie a shoe-lace was better than Beethoven. In repose, with a forearm flung across his eyes, the side muscles running above his ribs looked like the two hands of a jealous lover clutching him from behind; and the black curls of his armpit hair entranced me like the head of Medusa. His long slim brown fingers, closing over the handle of a Mexican child's toy, repeated in miniature the beauty of his body, exquisitely perfect like a carving in topaz. Or as he kneeled above me, and I looked upwards at the incredible landscape of his abdomen and chest, watching the deep brows drawn together in concentration, or—seen from this angle—the almost baby-Latin face, the perfectly modeled lips with the under one drawn in a little, and the almost hypnotic pattern of the rapidly moving muscles of his right arm and shoulder—well, these were things I was busily photographing upon the inexhaustible plates of my mental camera, to develop later and cherish through all my life.

And then suddenly it all came to a dull and thudding end.

Angelo came in one day. We talked for a little while, but he seemed distracted.

«What's the matter, kiddo?» I asked him at last.

He bit his under lip. «I must've strained myself up at the gym,» he said, and he described the symptoms.

I shook my head. «Oh-oh,» I said. «It's the doctor for you, me bucko.»

«You think it is...?»

«He'll tell you,» I said. «But don't delay. Where'd you get it?»

He shook his head, miserable. «I dunno,» he said. And then he got up and struck his fist into his hand. «Damn it, and just when things were goin' so good.»

«One of the hazards of the profession,» I said, as calmly as I could. And then I gave him some money for the injection and sent him away.

I remember once reading in the pages of a French novel something to the effect that luckily there were those who preferred the 'mal-foutus', the poorly-put-together ones—and who gave them some pleasure in life. And I must confess that I found a certain perverse attractiveness in the 'broken vessels'—persons missing a finger, or an arm... But Angelo's particular method of breaking the vessel was the one thing which I could not endure. It would take me months before I could bring myself to touch him again, no matter how quickly he was cured.

After that, I saw him only once. He came in to announce that he was leaving for Redondo Beach, to live with some wealthy guy who had asked him. There had been trouble at home—his father making financial demands, his mother scolding, and Carlo after him with increased vigor.

«I can't stand it any longer,» he said. «I'm old enough now to be on my own.»

I could not resist a faint bitterness as I said, «You call this being on your own?»

«Well,» he said, «perhaps I should just have said 'away from home,» Then he paused, and made a little backward movement with his head, to indicate the back room. «Do you wanna—?»

Carefully I explained to him why I still could not yet. He flushed, and looked at his elegantly pointed shoes. «Well...» he said.

«But let me watch you just once more,» I said, and he nodded.

And then he lay on the bed in the back room, and I sat in the chair behind him. I looked for a last time at the long tawny flanks of my jungle cat, my black panther; watched the pattern of his muscles as his arm moved, and saw again the arched foot, with tensed toes pointing downward, the tight-clenched eyes—and then after a little while I could no longer see what was happening because my vision was so blurred.

*

Who can say at what moment love begins, or when it ends?

Now, when I leave the shop and go home, I look at my statues, I listen to my music, and then I go to bed. I sleep on my left side and put my left hand, palm up, under the pillow beneath my head. And then for some reason—perhaps a childish one long buried—I reach up with my right hand and clasp it around my left wrist. And at that moment, I always think of Angelo.

Bits of news reach me from time to time—oddly enough, brought to me by Carlo. Angelo is about to have a record pressed by one of the big companies, he drives a fine new car (but not his own), he has new clothes but no pocket money...

And in the last half-conscious moment before I go to sleep, I sometimes wonder if Angelo could get away from his Redondo Bitch long enough to go to Tokyo with me next Christmas...

—Ward Stames

Diese Feste schätzt man nicht in Köln

Münster, 28. Mai. *«Wir in Köln dulden solche Feste nicht!» Mit diesem Beschluss vereitelten die Kölner Behörden den Versuch, das Nachtleben der Stadt um sogenannte «Männer-Bälle» zu bereichern.*

Gastwirt Freddy M. (32), ein früherer Kellner, hatte die Sache gestartet. In Amsterdam und Hamburg hatte er zuvor in einschlägigen Etablissements Studien getrieben.

Bald war sein Lokal in Köln der Treffpunkt der Eingeweihten. Aber er hatte Pech. Unter den tanzenden Männern befanden sich eines Abends zwei Kriminalbeamte.

Sie hatten sich grossartig getarnt. Und sie hielten ihre Augen offen. Auch Freddys zweideutig gesalzene Ansagen notierten sie.

Auf Grund ihrer Meldung wurde das Lokal geschlossen. Begründung: «Der Gastwirt ist persönlich unzuverlässig.»

Freddy klagte. Ohne Erfolg. Das Verwaltungsgericht Köln und jetzt auch die zweite Instanz in Münster gaben den Behörden recht. Vergebens schilderte Freddy den hohen Herren, was es auf diesem Gebiet in Amsterdam und Hamburg alles gäbe. Das Gericht meinte nur: «Wenn in Hamburg etwas passiert, wird man wohl auch dort einschreiten...»

«BILD», 28. Mai 1962

Es steht uns nicht zu, Kritik an einem Verbot in einem andern Land zu üben, weil wir die Begründung «Der Gastwirt ist persönlich unzuverlässig» nicht genügend erklären können. Trotz der betrüblichen Situation in Zürich müssen wir unseren Zürcher Kriminalbeamten doch das ehrende Zeugnis ausstellen, dass sie es innerhalb von zwei Jahrzehnten und mehr nie nötig hatten, «sich grossartig zu tarnen.» Das gegenseitige Vertrauensverhältnis und die Verhaltensweisen waren immer derart, dass weder so noch so eine Klage laut geworden wäre. Des Kölner Gastwirts «zweideutig gesalzene Ansagen» waren vielleicht unklug, vielleicht sogar geschmacklos; wir wissen es nicht. Nun, in Männergesellschaften der besten Kreise sind sie oft auch nicht gerade für Konfirmanden berechnet und schliesslich war man ja wohl «unter sich».

Ist sonst nichts Verbotswidriges vorgefallen, so kann man sich fragen, ob es gut ist, solche Ventile generell abzustellen. Sie drängen die Homophilen mehr und mehr in ein Katakomben-Dasein, das sich einer vernünftigen Kontrolle entzieht und Gefahren heraufbeschwört, die sicher nicht im Sinne einer aufgeschlossenen Behörde liegen. Man isoliere solche Veranstaltungen auf die Betroffenen und halte Zaungäste fern, die nichts damit zu tun haben — und stelle den Homophilen die Bedingung einer unerlässlichen Selbstkontrolle, einer Kultivierung der Programme — und im übrigen gebe man ihnen die Möglichkeit, hin und wieder sich ihrer Tanzfreude hinzugeben. Das kann Spannungen lösen, die viele Entgleisungen verhindern helfen. — Cerberus.

Baufonds für eigene Klubräume in Zürich

Wir danken den Abonnenten 3518, 5098 und 5272 für ihre Spenden. Der Kreis
