

# PLATONIC HAIR



QIU MIAOJIN

This is the first overtly lesbian-themed story by Qiu Miaojin (1969–1995), a writer who, apart from the accolades she won from Taiwan’s literary establishment, is also celebrated in local lesbian subcultures as the island’s best-known lesbian author. Qiu’s most influential works are her novels, *The Crocodile’s Journal* (1994) and the semiautobiographical *Montmartre Testament* (published posthumously in 1996), both now lesbian classics. *The Crocodile’s Journal* won the *China Times* Honorary Novel Prize for Qiu posthumously, following her suicide in Paris at just twenty-six. In an interesting development since the mid-1990s, *La-zi*, the name of the lesbian protagonist of *The Crocodile’s Journal*, has become a ubiquitous code word for lesbian identity in Taiwan’s *nütongzhi* Internet cultures.

Qiu’s thematic exploration of “T-*po*” lesbian relations (comparable to, but not identical with “butch-femme” relations) has occasioned some debate among Taiwan’s feminist and lesbian cultural critics. Liou Liang-ya writes, “[Qiu’s] fiction reflects the loneliness and desolation of [one who had] not

yet been baptized in feminism and the *tongzhi* movement,” yet in the same article she also argues that “*The Crocodile’s Journal* and . . . ‘Platonic Hair’ highlight the fact that T-po are what Judith Butler calls performative, rather than being expressive of an essence.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, for Liou, Qiu’s representations of T-po relationships at once draw upon entrenched, conservative ideologies of masculinity and femininity and destabilize those ideologies.

This story originally appeared in the *Independence Evening Post* (1990) and was then collected in Qiu’s first book of short stories, *The Revelry of Ghosts*, published in 1991. Playing with the reader’s interpretation of the narrator’s gender, this story once again explores the lesbian gender categories of “T” and po. Although this story was published early compared to other examples of writing from this generation (for example Chen, Chi, and Hong, this volume), its style makes clear Qiu’s status as one of the “new-generation” authors born in the late 1960s and early 1970s: The setting is a kind of generic contemporary city, and most of the action takes place in locales inhabited by the young urban middle class, such as cafés, bars, and rented apartments distant from family connections. This story is marked by the emotional intensity and suggestions of the surreal and nightmarish that are characteristic of Qiu’s writing.



“Your hair’s so long!”

Han parted my hair from my forehead and let it drop onto the pillow on either side of my head. Both our pillow covers were plain purple, and facing each other in the corners of these matching squares of purple were two black, embroidered birds, hers in the upper right hand corner, mine in the upper left. The two black birds gazed fixedly at each other. She loved purple; I loved black. I often said that sleeping here every night I felt I’d be drowned by her purple, to which she’d reply that it was my black that unreasonably confined her gaze. Even the rug on the floor that we used as a bed was purple. The only black thing was the door, forcibly painted by me.

“Your hair’s much longer than mine is!” I absently stroked her fringe with my left hand, as my right, cradling her head, moved back and forth amid the softness of her long tresses.

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“But you’re a man!” She blinked at me, assuming an expression of protest.

“Can’t men have long hair?” I protested back at her.

“No. Men aren’t allowed to.”

“But long hair is so beautiful, don’t you love your own hair?”

“If you had long hair, too, you’d stop loving mine. And what’s more, before long someone else who loves long hair would fall in love with you. I might as well just cut my hair off right now and become the person who falls in love with your long hair. How about that?” Her eyes stared resolutely at me and her voice trembled slightly, so weak it almost betrayed the hoarse breaking of tears. At times like this she would affect a clumsy, bullying tone, as though to make up for her all too obvious weakness.

“Don’t, you mustn’t cut your hair, you’re a woman! I’ve grown used to your beauty with long hair. I’ve come to depend on my love for it, and that dependent love has become a patch of rich, fertile soil in my heart. To cut out that love would be too agonizing!”

Only after hearing my pleas did she smile the smile of the victor. She calmly embraced me and leaned against my shoulder, then closed her eyes, leaving me to stare intently at her face. I resisted the desire to kiss her gently closed eyelashes and faced another endless night of contentment and torture.

She dedicates herself to tormenting me. I take a long drag on my cigarette, shut my eyes and recall the dialogue in that scene, her protests, her bullying, and the delicate alterations to her expression in the moment of victory. These words and her face fill my memory to bursting—they pour out of it, my head like a bag with a hole in the bottom. I need only lie down on that purple rug for them to begin climbing out along my hair as the strands grow longer with each passing moment, each memory competing with the others for first place.

They drop down in all directions about me, then they push and shove and struggle with each other and roll into all corners of the room. By the time I woke up on the first day this happened, it was

already impossible to find my way across the floor without treading on her face. I burst out in a laugh of amazement: "How can you torment me so?" Kneeling down in tears, I gathered one by one into a drawer the translucent faces that covered the floor like ball bearings.

Right now I'm wearing a black leather jacket, leather pants, and sunglasses and standing under the eaves of a derelict single-storied house. Opposite is "her" place. This is a narrow, dank alley where two rows of mean little houses flourish between a pair of tall tower blocks. Standing under the eaves on this side, if I extend my arm I can just about touch the eaves on the other side.

At the moment I'd calculated, the man with the red jacket brings "her" back. He then lowers his head and marches away from the mouth of the alley as though he detested it. I slip quickly over to the alley's other side and stub out my cigarette on the wall, dropping it onto the pile of butts in the gutter.

(Han: I haven't written a single word for the past five years. Each time I sit down at my desk and pick up a pen, as soon as the tip of the pen meets the paper I find myself uncontrollably drawing you. Your thick, fragrant, sleek, long hair; your cleanly drawn eyebrows; your bright eyes; your high-bridged, straight nose; your glistening lips. My hand is like my hair: with the strong psychic force of my longing it's taken on mysterious new functions.)

How you used to wish I'd write something good. Before you met me I'd written a pile of best-selling romances, using this talent to support myself for ten years after my graduation. But I promised you I would stop using words as a moneymaking tool. You said better you should keep me and let me concentrate on my writing, so sure were you in your belief that I could become a respected writer.)

As I think of this, my long hair stirs quietly to life. The green lichens on the wall begin to creep like spiders in the shadows of the ink-blue dusk. I gather up my hair, afraid it will be infected with the lichens' restlessness.

Soon "she" appears, no longer dressed in the white uniform of a moment before but wearing a tight, scoop-necked purple evening dress covered in innumerable sequins. From "her" bag, made of a

mesh of silver balls, “she” takes out a pair of pink sunglasses, then hurries from the alley. I stand on this side watching “her” retreating silhouette. “Her” hair, gathered up in a ponytail, has shaken itself out into a cloud, and it falls and swishes over naked shoulders. Suddenly my eyes are as blind as if they had been stabbed with a sword, and in my head there bursts a great flash of light like electricity —

“You’ve written a stack of romance novels, but do you really know anything about the city’s nightly traffic in desire?”

Seated in front of the bright window of his tenth-story office, my boss, K, spun around in his high-backed chair and challenged me to respond to his interrogation.

“I guess it’s pretty much how I write it in the romances,” I replied nonchalantly.

“Hmph, you youngsters imagine the world like a kids’ cartoon. Huh! If a person reaches forty and still uses the word ‘love’ to describe what happens between men and women in this world, he’s either an idiot or a genius!” With that he threw his feet smugly up onto his marble desk.

“Then why publish all these romance novels?” I felt cheated.

“Because the folks with the time and the cash to spend on books are all under forty! I think of their money with ‘love,’ then use their money to pay you guys to create ‘love!’”

“How do people *over* forty think about men and women?”

“Why not take some cash and buy someone, and see for yourself? I’ll pay you to write about your love experiment!”

K scratched the stubble on his jaw with the long, pointed nail of his pinkie. The self-satisfied tilt of his chin and the sideways glint of his eye seemed to measure up how much I was worth. I knew his money could buy a romance writer, but I didn’t believe it could buy love. So I had no objection to taking his cash to get myself a love toy. Moreover, I decided that the more shocking and the more costly it was, the better.

“Have you got a Marlboro? Give me one?” The woman in the purple vest said to the red-haired woman by her side, about ten years her senior.

“Out of cigarettes, are you? If you want a smoke, go bum one from a guy!” The red-haired woman blew a careless smoke ring at her.

“What’s the matter? Can’t even spare a cigarette?”

“Serves you right! Who told you to be so picky—those two old geezers who asked your price weren’t good enough for you, no, you have to wait for a young guy—and now you’re left with not even a cigarette to smoke!”

“At least I’ve still got my capital! Unlike you—so desperate you throw yourself at anything that moves!”

“You’re kidding me—you think youth is capital? When you strip off, isn’t it all the same two bits of meat and a hole? That face of yours could only take in a rank amateur. When men come here to buy happiness, what they want is true skill, and I know all your little tricks.”

“Yeah, right! And before they can take advantage of that true skill of yours they have to stick a bag over your ugly face. I’ve got more than one guy coming after me each night—why shouldn’t I be a bit picky?”

“Princess, don’t think that just because you’ve done a few days’ study you’re some kind of a goddess. Once you’ve been in this line of work, no matter how you dress it up, all you’re left with is one messed-up body!”

With this, the red-haired woman threw her half-smoked cigarette onto the wet sidewalk and ground it out thoroughly with her heel, then walked haughtily away.

I was driving K’s Cadillac and had stopped at the corner of M Street and W Street. I’d wound down the black-tinted window and now sat in the car, listening in on the two women’s conversation.

Driving into this district you were immediately engulfed by a stream of luxury cars. On both sides of the road under the shops’ awnings crowded a mass of people, each sniffing out the scent of his

prey, while the fantastic light of the neon signs flashed out its colorful welcome to the hunters. Women with their faces caked in powder and rouge emerged from the stream of women flowing down the street. Stationing themselves at particular spots along M Street, they were like the street's own living fossils.

Under my shades my eyes surveyed the fossil lineup. The purple vest stood out immediately: She seemed unwilling to take up a position in any particular spot. My car trailed her down the length of the street.

She agreed quickly to the contract and flashed me an ID card on which was written in careless script the name Wang Xiujuan. Just as I was wondering what could have made her agree to be part of this absurd experiment, she reached out from her seat opposite me in the café booth and took off my sunglasses.

"With a woman like me, you've got nothing to hide," she said playfully. "So you want to spend your money to buy an imitation of a man's experience of love? Starting from now, we've both got to become conscientious actors."

Standing, she produced from her handbag a black shirt, which she now put on, carefully fastening its buttons one by one until the purple vest was completely obscured. Seeing her expression of concentration as she fastened the buttons, I couldn't help but feel a certain curiosity about this twenty-year-old girl. She composed her face into a placid expression and said with a shy laugh, "For the next six months just call me Han-Han."

I took Han-Han home that night. I live in a little concrete room on top of a four-storied apartment block, with the toilet outside by the cooling tower. Aside from my room, the whole rooftop is taken up with a huge pile of junk. When I opened the wooden door that leads to the roof, she let out a shriek of joy and rushed to the junk heap, squatted down, and began sorting through it like a real professional. Soon she'd unearthed a rectangular piece of rotten wood, a little copper statue with flaking lacquer, and a broken, round-bellied coffee

mug. She leapt excitedly over to where I stood and thrust these objects into my arms, saying, "There! These are for you as a welcome gift. Here's to our eternal love!"

I opened a window onto the night sky, took a deep breath of the still, fragrant midnight air, and keeping my back to her, lit a cigarette. My hands were trembling. Even though I must have been more than ten years older than this girl, with her around I somehow felt less at home than she appeared to be in my own room. You might say I lacked any sense of security.

I began to regret having been taken in by K's prank. It was as though I'd stepped outside the safety lines that had delimited my existence since birth, and the alarm bells had started ringing. I finally understood: The wild fantasies that passed for sex scenes in my novels were really no more than landscape pictures that I painted on the walls of my closed-up room. If I wanted to walk into the landscape, I had first to leave that room.

In the first hour we said nothing. She was rushing back and forth between the bedroom and the bathroom arranging her clothes, cosmetics, shower things, and a few leisure magazines, all of which she'd brought with her in a big canvas bag. As she knelt on the yellow-and-blue-checked linoleum floor considering the question of how best to organize her things, her face wore the same expression of concentration I'd noticed earlier. It was like a dove that flies over to rest on your hand to peck at birdseed, making you afraid to move lest it take fright. That expression suited her age, but it made a startling contrast with her professional image.

The surer I was that she moved about under my gaze, in my space, as relaxed as a fish swimming in water, the more afraid I became of her. She, a streetwalker—moreover, a woman who had gladly accepted her part in this ridiculous game—was used to what I considered a life of filth, a life that produced a nameless terror in my heart. She left me at a loss as to what it could possibly be that she meant to do.

"Han-Han, why did you agree to this?" My senses returned to me somewhat. I had taken K's money, and the girl had come home with

me; now all I could do was take a deep breath and go on with the charade as best I could.

"Wouldn't it be easiest to think I did it for the money?" She shot me a sly look from where she knelt scrubbing the floor.

"It can't be that simple. What you'll get from me is nothing to what you'd earn working."

"Hey! In the six months I live with you, I can still go out and work at night!"

"Aha! In that case you get the money *plus* a free hotel—no wonder you agreed."

"Wrong. I've got my own place ten times more comfortable than this. After my second year in the trade I bought myself a bed-sit. No, the main reason I came here is that I enjoy taking risks. I like making love with completely different people."

"*Making love*? Completely different people? Including people like me?"

I almost screamed when she uttered those two words. In the fanciful romances I wrote, regardless of the age of the male and female characters, as long as they were human, then any combination of two of them together invariably resulted in unrestrained passion and wildly imaginative "sex." Despite this, when the person here in front of me used the words "making love" as freely I did in my novels, she broke my taboos so completely that I felt I'd stumbled on a beehive in a dark crevice: My fingers were stung all over, and hot pain overwhelmed me.

"Sure! I'll probably never get to meet another customer like you. My clients usually conform to a handful of specific types, like low-down old men, poor impotent guys who like to make a show of it, and a few rotten old whore sisters. Being with you will be something different—plus, I'll get to teach this writer how to 'make love.'"

She asked me if I wanted to take a shower with her, as casually as if she was asking me whether I wanted to eat with her. When I hastened to wave my hand energetically in refusal, she gave a strange laugh, as if she'd seen through to the turmoil in my heart and wanted deliberately to tease me.

I was surprised at myself for not despising her casual approach to physical intimacy. This wasn't because I aspired to some Euro-American notion of "sexual liberation." Rather it was because those words sounded utterly natural and elegant when she spoke them, while had another person spoken them they would have given off the stench of filth.

After her shower she emerged wearing a filmy purple negligée. I caught fleeting glimpses of her bra and underpants underneath, and the curves of her body showed up as clean as those of a statue. This was the first time I'd ever been so close to a young woman's body, and though I shouldn't have, I felt slightly excited. It was just like the feeling I'd had when I'd looked at myself naked in the mirror for the first time.

"According to the rules of the contract, you are now my man, and like it or not you've got to look like my kind of man. The first thing we've got to do is cut that pretty hair of yours."

Picking up some scissors, she ordered me to sit down in front of the big floor-length mirror. First she chopped off the length of my hair in one snip, leaving hair reaching just to the nape of my neck. Then she carefully shaped the remaining hair a pinch at a time. She moved around me, entranced by the pleasure of her activity, examining me from different angles, yet seemingly quite forgetful of my existence.

First she trimmed the ends of my hair at the back into a perfect crescent, and then, after cutting two pointed sideburns in front of my ears, she appeared to wake up again. With a cry of delight she hugged my head and impulsively kissed me on the forehead, shouting, "My man has appeared!" I watched in amazement as she did all this, until, noticing, she let go of me in embarrassment.

The moment "she" leaves the alley I gather my thick, waist-length hair at the front and hold it tight in my left fist, afraid it might fly off strand by strand after "her."

That first time at the intersection of M and W Streets, it was my hair that first noticed "her." The instant my eyes lit on "her," the mil-

lion strands of my hair simultaneously moved around and shot straight out in front of me like fine black arrows. My head was just about ripped right off, making me howl in pain, and I was pulled bodily along for several paces while passersby gathered around in astonishment. Ecstasy burst in the depths of my heart. I knew what had happened: I had found her at last.

Over on the main road, a Volvo slows to a halt at the curb. A man in a red shirt stands by the car, chewing betelnut, and gestures for “her” to hurry. As “she” rushes over in “her” high-heeled shoes the sequins on “her” purple evening dress are like mirrors catching light in the dark night. The heel of “her” shoe breaks, “her” body twists, and “she” falls to the ground.

The fact that I am about twenty meters away from “her” aside, I have absolutely no desire to go over to help “her” up. Mechanically, I play with the lighter in my hand, pressing down the red tab on top. I remember the time she wore that cream-colored nightdress that reached only to the top of her thighs and sat on the bed with her head bowed, hugging herself and saying, “Oh, I’m so frightened!” Then, I stood coldly off at a distance, like a camera filming an interview. Han, I didn’t dare go to you: I was so frightened.

I open the black wooden door to my room and the purple of the four walls wells up and swallows me. Every time I come home I want to stand in the dark and rub my hands and cheeks over the walls’ particles of purple. Han never taught me how to make love with her, only how to do it with the walls.

In the dark, I start up my computer and the screen opens to a journal running from the 20th of October to the 21st of April. Inside it are all the letters we wrote each other, as well as a detailed history that we took turns typing on the computer. The characters on the screen jump faster and faster until they look like a swarm of out-of-control green ants, constantly changing their battle array, invading the soft part of my brain —

March 21. We still haven’t made love (day 152). Intimacy rating: 90. Han.

“People are like a collection of pearls. Until someone threads

them together on a string, the collection has no shape or hierarchy," Han said.

"So you believe there's no necessary system to them?"

"Right. It's not like arranging building blocks."

"But I can't seem to forget about the system that tells you which building block ought to go with which other building block!"

"So you can't make love with me, even though you really want to?"

"Mm—I'd be punished!"

"Like a curse?"

"Yes, like a curse!"

In the afternoons I worked as an editor at a publishing company, coming home in the evening to write. Each night I'd pick Han up in front of a bar on M Street at 2 A.M. She didn't begin work until eight in the evening. Sometimes her "company" set up clients for her and sent a car around to collect her; other times she went it alone, picking customers up off the street in the busy part of town.

Each night she'd sit down on the bed and put on her makeup and her seductive clothes and jewelry; then, with an apologetic look in her eyes, she'd say good-bye to me. She always leaned in the doorway a few moments staring at me—I think she hoped I'd go over and give her a hug and some moral support. But I'd just put on a false smile and say, "Have a good time at work." As my eyes followed her retreating form, I was careful to remind myself, "I and she are two separate people; I write my novels, and she works as a prostitute. It's that simple." Yet for no reason at all there always remained a little sadness.

Every night after two, Han-Han and I spent time alone together, chatting idly or driving out on midnight trips to bars to drink and dance. Or else we'd just go home to listen to music, make coffee, and cook. She'd tell me about goings-on in the circles she moved in, and I'd relate to her stories from my writing. I also taught her how to read good fiction.

She took away the clothes I used to wear and bought me some men's suits of the type she preferred, as well as cuff links and after-shave and such. She ruled that in her presence I had to dress according to the image she liked, and she lost no opportunity to tease me sexually.

Despite all this, we each felt it would be impossible to love the other. I believed that although I might like her as a person, I could not feel love or desire for a woman. She felt that while she needed someone she could trust to hold her and to be physically intimate with her, she was nevertheless incapable of falling in love.

I was parked at the entrance to the bar called The Zither, and I'd already waited an unusually long time. Then I saw the black glass automatic door slide open, and out came two men wearing lewd expressions and supporting Han between them by an arm each. Han was dead drunk. Now Han was a great drinker, and when she went out with clients she always kept a clear head. I often laughingly accused her of "committing crimes in cold blood"—and I'd never once seen her drunk. Seeing her that way now, I cared for her so much I felt it would melt my heart away.

Taking advantage of her drunken daze, one of the johns grabbed at her crotch with his free hand while the other pushed his head into her breasts as he walked, and bit her nipple ferociously through her dress.

I felt that my head would explode. I rushed toward them as if in a trance, and using all my strength I managed to separate her from the johns. I roared that Han was already bought for the night, and one of them hit me in the face. When Han heard the sound of his fist on my face, she burst into loud sobs and took out a wad of cash from her purse, then stuffed it into one of the johns' hands. Clutching my hand tight she said, "Take me home."

Back at home Han threw up all over both of us, covering us in vomit, yet all the while she kept up a continuous, excited stream of drunken babble. I removed the suit and shirt that I'd worn for her and wet my head to soften my hair, which was combed hard with gel. Then I prepared to give us both a bath.

As I helped her out of each piece of her clothing, I was quite sure

that I had no need to fear impure thoughts and that I would quite naturally be able to accomplish the task of bathing her. After all, only a man's body could excite me, and this was merely a woman.

But when she and I sat facing each other naked in the cramped, narrow bathroom, I found my heart racing so hard that my face blushed bright red, and gradually I became aware of a tight, cramped feeling between my legs. Guilt made me want to drop her then and there and leap from the room. In my panic I found myself detesting her: I loathed her too-beautiful body, I loathed how she had sexually teased me before now. So I finished hastily, splashing us with plain water and dispensing with the soap, deciding that this was bath enough.

Even though she was so drunk she couldn't stand up, she remained sensitive to my embarrassment and panic, and as she gazed at me she let out a hysterical laugh. In the confusion of that moment I was suddenly aware of something: This girl's body and feelings had come to be of significance to me. The realization produced a kind of cloying joy in my heart. My sense of the combined significance of her body and her feelings grew stronger and stronger: With all the love experiences of my more than thirty years of life, I had never known such perfect balance.

Her body, still reeking of alcohol, was like a mysterious symbol that opened a strange new world to me.

When my head cleared I realized that her whole body was radiating heat, her forehead and cheeks as hot as a kettle. I wrapped her in the rug on the floor, all of a sudden unreasonably afraid that she might die at any moment. I burst into helpless tears.

"What're you crying about?"

"I don't know, I just feel like crying. It's as though you're about to die."

"Silly, how could I possibly die so easily?"

"That's not all it is. I feel as if my life has a hole in it and my things are pouring out and your things are pouring in. I can't tell whose are whose."

"Then don't bother separating them! Thirty years old, and still you make your life such a fuss!"

Weakly, Han-Han lifted her hand, and with the lightest of touches she wiped away my tears. Then she stroked the hair on my forehead and by my ears, back and forth, her hand like a little boat floating in a light breeze. I had done the same thing myself for others in the past, but I'd never thought that these gentle touches could harbor such a power of tenderness. Suddenly I understood that this was "femininity."

Only with this new consciousness of the thing called "femininity" did I truly understand what it was that had made me cry so helplessly. It was that I was "female," too!

I was very seldom aware of my own gender. When she had spoken of "making love" and invited me to shower with her, my shock had been the result of the view that "one shouldn't have sex without love." Even when she'd cut my hair short and gotten me to wear suits and aftershave, I had approached the matter with the professional attitude of "thoroughly experiencing masculinity," remaining insensitive to the question of my own gender.

I had never given much thought to gender difference, and even less to my own femininity or masculinity. In my eyes, I and others belonged simply to the single category of "people." As for people's relations with each other—love, sex, marriage—I took it for granted that these things just happened naturally, and that it was the same for me. Only now did I discover that hidden beneath that "naturalness" were prohibitions I found quite intolerable.

I was now thirty-six, and had had three boyfriends, with two of whom I'd had sexual relations. Since the time of my first love at twenty, I'd been writing romances. Now there was no more love in my life, and I knew I wouldn't get married. The task for me for what remained of my life was to find a suitable sexual partner and pass the remaining years in which I'd still have sexual needs, and after that my relations with others would come to an end.

So smooth and slippery were my relations with other people that now, all in a flash, I slipped clear off the slide.

"You won't make me go to the hospital, will you?" Han looked at me with pleading eyes.

"No, you must certainly go to the hospital!" A harsh terror gath-

ered at the bottom of my heart, and I had a vague premonition that something was about to happen.

"I was at the hospital only today—it was so awful, so frightening—I beg you, don't make me go back to be punished again!" She sobbed out loud as if there were some cruel thing tearing at her heart. Turning to lean her body against me, she took my hand in both of hers and laid it against her cheek.

"Why did you go to the hospital?"

"I went to get rid of a baby that I didn't know who the father was... It's all my own fault, I should've been more careful. The first time I let a man come inside me, when I was fifteen, was when I had to get rid of my first child. It was a terrible time. I didn't love the man at all, but I loved the baby too much. Since then I've understood two things about my life: One, that sex is very important to me, and two, that I'll never have children."

She stopped sobbing, her tears welling up silently.

During all the time we'd been together, we'd always respected each other's life. From those first days when we were so awkward together up till our present easy companionship, we'd been like two people playing opposite each other in a fully scripted play, neither of us touching the spirit of the other.

Now I no longer felt that she was simply an old hand skilled in the ways of the world, or a free individual who knew how to enjoy liberating herself. I became aware for the first time of the power of a certain tender, feminine beauty that emanated from her, a power that attracted and gathered the hitherto slumbering and dispersed particles of masculinity within me and told me that I must become strong and protect her.

"I think maybe I love you a little..." she laughed to me innocently.

"You're only twenty three, you don't understand love." I closed the door in a panic, shutting her on the other side.

"It's you that doesn't understand how to love a woman. No—is it that you don't dare?" I was silent for a long time.

"What's to be done. We'll both be thrown down to hell!"

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Finally I laid down my weapons and surrendered, burying my head in her chest and revealing my terror to her in choking sobs. After that, the two of us gazed at each other for a long time. A sweet smile appeared on her face and she stroked my head as if to say, “Everything will be all right.” With that she went, satisfied, to sleep.

“She” gets into the Volvo in her purple dress. Quickly I gather my hair on top of my head and secure it under a hat, then hail a cab and get it to tail the Volvo. “She” goes into The Zither, and as the door opens, a fat middle-aged man appears, smiling, to take her hand. I put on a tie under my black leather jacket, fix my sideburns in place with hair gel, and walk into the bar.

I sit at a table by a pillar in the corner, drinking brandy on my own. Women wearing high-split *qipaos* and men with eyes lit with the spark of desire move around me.<sup>2</sup> I can’t tell where one person ends and the next begins. The deafening music makes my tears wander about on my face, and the many bright colors of people’s clothes pile up on top of each other and get confused together so that I can’t find purple anywhere.

Mirrors cover the four walls. Notes of music fly around the mirrors, and every color but purple glitters and glows in them. All I want is to push all this aside and let my hair out, allowing each strand free to go in search of her.

(Han: It sounds awful but no matter what I do I can’t stop searching for you. What I’ll do if I find you, even I don’t know. I can’t even find in my memory whether you’re dead or you just went to live somewhere else. All this is like a riddle to me, and my life is victim to the riddle’s invasion.)

So I have to search compulsively for you, just as before I met you I compulsively wrote romances. It makes no difference—after all, isn’t living just a matter of compulsive expenditure? Only by continuing to search am I alive.)

A screen is lowered on one wall. In the darkness the images form into a sex scene between a man and a woman. A faceless man’s erect

penis penetrates the body of a woman whose face shows excitement, and my face is washed with tears.

Despite the ludicrous script penned by this third-rate writer, the two of us had become wrapped up in a life that was like a colorful, intoxicating landscape. I truly had walked into that familiar wall painting, but it felt completely different from my real life. All the paths were winding. I felt terror and joy at the same time, and it was Han who led me, but she skipped and jumped like a little kid out on an excursion.

From the time I first felt that dependent love for her, everything became terribly painful. Each evening after work I exercised the full strength of my will trying to force myself to wait at the office till after eight. But I was always defeated at the critical moment and found myself racing desperately home like a dog after its master.

More and more afraid to let me see her in her seductive clothes, she forbade me to return before she left, but still I sped home to see her. It took a hundred times more effort than before for me to pull my mouth into a smile and say, "Have a good time at work." In that scene, neither of us dared walk over and touch the other; it was as though some grim barrier stood between us. She even kept her back to me, rushing out after finishing her makeup, without so much as turning her head to look at me.

We went through this tragic parting night after night, never growing used to it. It was as if she was returning alone to the real world and leaving me by myself in the painted forest. I didn't detest her at all for her image as a prostitute or for the work she did. It was simply that when she transformed herself from my delicate little lover into an intrepid woman of the world, I felt a despair that was like plunging into a bottomless abyss. Between us stood a wall of stone: all the world's men. Reflecting that any man in the street was free to touch her body and that I alone could not, all I could do was drink hard liquor and cease to think.

In the winter night I began my vigil at twelve, smoking alone in the car for two hours. At last, now dressed in a purple shirt and

white jeans, her long hair spread over her back, her face washed clean of cosmetics and lit by a childlike smile, she appeared at the door.

I went to greet her, yearning despondently to bite down hard on her shoulder. She laughed innocently back at me as if to say that she wished to bite my shoulder, too, and that made me laugh as well. I took her hands and rubbed them hard from her palms to the backs of her hands, then from her thumbs to the tips of her little fingers. Only when her hands had lost their iciness and become warm did I take them and place them in the pockets of my big overcoat.

To be a woman who loves another woman is to be sharply, heart-piercingly humbled. The humiliation of not knowing what I could possibly give her shadowed my every move. Truly the only thing I could do for her was rub her icy hands.

"You don't blame me, do you?" Han had finished her shower and changed into a cream-colored nightdress with a purple koala drawing on the chest. She hugged a pillow and sat kneeling on the rug.

"Blame you for what? There's so much!" I pulled a face.

"How dare you! What do you mean, there's so much?" She feigned girlish anger, lying down with her back to me.

"Okay, okay. Good girl, turn around. Do you mean about your work?" I knelt beside her and brought my face to hers, taking advantage of her closed eyes to give her forehead a swift kiss. She opened her eyes wide and stared at me as though accusing me of breaking the rules, then pushed me away and sat up.

"You ought to know that I won't stop working for anyone. I'm not like those other girls who do it out of helplessness, sleeping with men every day and living their lives in tears. I believe I matured early. This is my own choice: This is the life I prefer.

"My dad is a university professor. He always respected me and let me make all my decisions for myself. The year I graduated from high school, I told him that I liked making love with men and that I liked making lots of money and living amid the nightlife of the city, so I had decided to take this path. He nodded his head and asked me to move out of home and cut my ties with him, and then he exhorted me over and over to be careful . . . Do you understand?"

Her gaze was unrelenting. Although I had sensed early on that she had a side that was intractable as rock, this revelation still left me with an odd feeling of horror.

“But it’s so painful—you only need men’s bodies and you don’t want mine, you won’t even let me touch you!”

“I understand, I truly do understand your torment. But in the whole world you’re the one person I can love. I don’t care that you’re a woman. The point is that aside from you, I can have sexual relations with anybody, but you’re quite different. Only if I love you with a hundred percent spiritual love can the two of us become one.”

“So I have to put up with it?”

“Poor thing! Lie down and fantasize like I do—enjoy the feeling of my abuse.”

Bending her legs to one side, she suddenly moved over and sat embracing me tightly, her hands clasped behind my neck.

“You fantasize about making love with me?”

The moment she touched me and I felt the special softness of her familiar body, an electric current ran through my whole frame. It was at once a current of excitement and a current of punishment.

“I want to so much! But I naturally imagine making love with a man—yet I can tell that the man is you.”

She let go of me and lay down, covering herself with the quilt. It was as though the plug had been pulled out, leaving me in the darkness with my ardent need for her.

After switching off the light, I curled up by the wall as far away from her as possible, silently smoking and thinking of the time when I had long hair. I, too, was once young like Han. Maybe I hadn’t even been aware that my long hair exerted an attractive force like hers. Perhaps it was because I myself had possessed the feminine beauty I now drew from Han’s body that I’d attracted those three men into my life, two of whom I’d let enter my body.

I let out a long breath; the moon illuminated a fine thread of smoke. Gathering my courage I recalled the sensation of being penetrated by a man. It was an intense and none too happy experience, like being attacked by a familiar body. When I saw a man’s body, it

didn't disgust me—I found it a little exciting and was able to be around it quite comfortably.

But Han's body I didn't dare imagine. The moment I thought of it the word "pain" appeared before my eyes and my heart shrank back. It produced a subtle feeling quite different from being with a man. When I was with her I was very clearly aware of my terror of her body—that I feared even my gaze touching her. At the same time I felt a contradictory, greedy desire to stare at her, touch her. I had to deliberately control my impulse to rush at her and brutally possess her. Were I a man, I thought, I'd probably have to beat her cruelly every day to balance out such contradictory feelings. I couldn't help laughing tears.

What I had been was now smashed into little pieces. I was utterly unable to find my place along the axes of masculine and feminine.

That night, the rising crescent moon shone with a desolate beauty. Han arrived home early, knocking madly at the wooden door. "I'm in trouble, come quick!" I hurried out to find her leaning, exhausted, against the wall. The hem of her knee-length skirt was covered in drops of red, and blood ran down her calves and onto the floor.

"Just now...at Treasure King...two clients came up together...then..."

Ashen-faced, she forced her mouth closed. Her eyes on me, with great effort she raised her right hand to her forehead and made a salute of apology. It was as though her feelings were being carved into me with a knife: She felt remorse.

My mind was in utter chaos. All I was aware of was a small, sharp voice reminding me: You must not break down.

Unconscious of what I was doing, I carried her to the bed, took off all her clothes, and found water, alcohol, towels, cotton wool, and antiseptic. Without a word I bathed her body with water and dabbed antiseptic on her wounded private parts and thighs. She stared at me, eyes wide with shock. Gradually her gaze became pathetic, begging for my pity.

"They hurt me..." she said suddenly in a thin, weak voice. She gasped with sobs that were like bullets exploding in my chest, each

one striking my heart. Unlocking my reservoir of tears I began to howl, working my lungs with all the strength I had.

“I can’t protect you . . . I wish I was dead . . .”

She extended her pure white arms in invitation to me, and I became sharply aware that our bodies were crying out for each other. I took off my own clothes and my flesh was pulled naturally toward hers until our skins stuck together like glue. My hands madly caressed every inch of her flesh and my lips greedily sucked at her hair, her eyes, her lips, her breasts, between her legs. . . . The whole volcano erupted.

“I hate you . . . Why aren’t you a man . . .”

With her face covered in tears and her unruly hair stuck to her cheeks, she bit the flesh of my shoulder until I was ready to pass out with pain. In my confusion I was aware that my short hair had suddenly grown long and was fastening itself tightly about her neck.

At last, in a gap between two people, I see purple. The hair tied down under my hat begins to stir, making the hat puff up. “She” is sitting on a marble stool, laughing easily and holding up a wineglass, drinking the health of the man opposite her. “She” is surrounded by a circle of men. The laser lights begin their orbit and one after another they move across “her” face as “she” pushes back “her” long hair. In my mind I slow down “her” action at that moment, and behind closed eyes imagine “her” hair sprinkling out colored sparks as it falls back.

(Han: I follow you like this day after day, looking at you from a distance, just as before I used to drive you around. With time my hair has gradually grown long again—long enough soon to strangle you once more. This is my hair’s “inclination,” just as you must prostitute yourself, and just as I am . . .)

I follow “her” into the women’s washroom, take out my scissors, and before “she” has a chance to scream, *snip snap*, I chop off the hair in great hanks. The fallen hair flies over and winds itself around “her,” snatching off “her” longhaired wig. In the mirrors along both walls I see a bald man, and I can’t tell who it is.

## PLATONIC HAIR

### NOTES

1. Liou Liang-ya, "Aiyu, xingbie yu shuxie" (Desire, Gender and Writing), in *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* 303 (August 1997): 8–9, my translation.
2. A *qipao* is a traditional tight-fitting dress made of embroidered satin or silk, with splits up the side of the leg. *Trans.*

