

## **Panda Cunt, Bear Gall**

Let me cut to the chase and tell you why I'm here: it has come to be that the only thing my boyfriend gets off on, is if I put on a panda suit. He's a researcher at the Wolong Reserve—this is strictly confidential, right?—and they've pioneered this method there in which no human enters the field of vision of a panda unless they are in a panda suit.

It's to aid in reintroducing the pandas into the wild, because every single panda they've reintroduced so far has either died pretty quickly, or lumbered back to the reserve. Those pandas that grew up around humans before they designed this method, they don't know how to fear humans, or they're too used to humans.

I must say, the program is pretty good. It takes someone with imagination to come up with something like that. Someone like my boyfriend. And you see, this is why I find it so hard to leave him: I know the person who makes me put on the panda suit before we have sex is also the person who's crazy and brilliant enough to design the only programme in China's conservation history to successfully reintroduce pandas bred in captivity back into the wild, and to convince his uptight superiors that it's not going to make them a laughingstock but a pioneer. He does have this antagonistic charisma about him that helps him get his way.

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The pandas China gave to Washington D.C. refused to have sex, so my boyfriend was flown to D.C. to assist the American zoologists. No, I take that back—China doesn't give out pandas like bonbons anymore, not even to countries we want to make nice with—the pandas we *loaned* to Washington. Panda rental: one million US dollars per year, with the condition that any cub born in that period still belongs to China. He'd be there for two weeks, and I'd never been to America, so he bought me a ticket, and I could stay with him at the hotel they were putting him up in.

Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, those are their names. So the problem didn't lie with both pandas—just the male one, Tian Tian. He simply didn't know what to do, even when the female, Mei Xiang, prostrated herself in front of him, wet between her legs. Mei Xiang, she wanted it bad. I saw her masturbating, would you believe it. Digging her big furry paw in between her legs and moving it up and down, up and down. Before that she was marking her scent all around the enclosure, from the stones, to the ground, to the play area, a waxy, hormonal secretion from a gland hidden under her tail.

And my boyfriend, he brought his homemade Wolong panda porn for the pandas in America to watch. No, seriously, he gets paid to do stuff like that, and they set up a nice little projector and a white screen in a cloistered area of the enclosure, it was so surreal. Before we left for D.C. he made me watch it with him, asked me if the sequencing was okay or if they ought to do tighter jump cuts to the panda genitalia. I said No, 'cause the pandas, they have to learn socially, the big picture, you can't have the parts zoomed in all out of context, and then he told me this thing about how when he was in Tokyo for work once—Ling Ling, the old panda at Ueno Zoo, had kidney problems; we have a long history with Japan: Empress Wu Zetian gave the Japanese

emperor a pair during the Tang dynasty, and that was the beginning of panda diplomacy as we know it—the Japanese zoologist had taken them to a stripshow near Shinjuku and they were seated in the front row and everyone in the front row was given a shot of whisky and a magnifying glass.

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We were both students in zoology. I majored in comparative anatomy and he majored in ethology, already with a focus on pandas. What do I do now? I'm a black bear activist. Sometimes they're called moon bears, 'cause of that sweet white streak of fur across their chests. You know them; the ones whose paws we Chinese consider a delicacy, the ones we cage up for a decade with a tube permanently stuck into them in the name of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Here's a little something to relieve a fever, to improve your eyesight, bear bile pills. Well why don't you take some aspirin or sponge your forehead or eat carrots and wolfberries? Motherfucker, it makes me so mad. It's a completely unnecessary situation, and the benefits of bear bile as a TCM ingredient are easily substitutable by coptis or rhubarb. Or, if you really must have your bile, then, there are pharmaceutical-grade options purified and packaged from slaughterhouses and you can consume that to your heart's content—Ursofalk, Actigall—but no, these people insist on bear bile.

What's in the bile, I'll tell you. We *all* have it in our bile—all mammals, us humans too—this thing called ursodeoxycholic acid, which is the active therapeutic substance. It is believed that there's a higher percentage of this present in bear bile, but modern chemistry has already invalidated this fact.

So maybe now you think I'm some cutesy young fu er dai who can afford to see a psychiatrist to talk about her sex life, who has a degree but doesn't want to get a real job, that activism is bohemian, the way high society ladies buy art. But let me tell you, if you saw as I saw what it is like in these bile farms—ten crush cages 2.6 feet by 4.4 feet by 6.5 feet for an animal of 110 to 260 pounds, they don't ever get to move or stand or turn around *for the rest of their lives*—if you saw the way the bears moaned and banged their heads against their cages and chewed their own paws—I don't know how anyone could live with themselves, to not be moved to do something.

Can you imagine, the resultant severe mental stress and muscle atrophy? It's worse than the living conditions of a concentration camp. I can talk about this all day. I haven't even gone into the extraction methods, the constant pain, how would you like it if I stuck a tube into your gallbladder, or how about a metal catheter, or if I made a permanent hole in your abdomen so that what I wanted could drip out freely? And mind you, the last method is said to be the *most humane and least painful*. Can you imagine? And that sometimes, this hole is kept open with a perspex catheter, and the bears are fitted with an iron vest then—because it is so painful that without the iron vest, they would pound at their own stomachs unceasingly, in response to the pain.

And at the end of the day, the most ironic thing is that it has been calculated that, to sustain TCM practices, a total of five hundred kilograms of bear bile is needed each year. But the research team from the World Society for the Protection of Animals,

they found that more than 7000kg was being produced each year. The surplus, it's used in non-essential shit like wines and eyedrops. All that pain and terror for *eyedrops*? I'm embarrassed to be human.

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So no, this really also tells you about the relationship dynamics between my boyfriend and I. In some ways, in spite of the work he's done, I think he's so superficial. To me, choosing to care about whether a few cute pandas are getting it on when thousands of moon bears are atrophying in tiny cages with open wounds in their abdomens is cheap. It's as cheap as we were insinuating Taiwan to be when we offered them pandas as a *domestic* transfer rather than an international exchange applicable to the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species. And the names we gave them, oh my god! Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan, could anything be more brazen, strong-arm reunion tactics presented as giant black-and-white furballs. But we better not talk politics; I have my eye on this clock and I only have thirty more minutes.

But do you get it, about the pandas? It was a British naturalist who said he would eat the last panda if doing so would help funnel resources and funding towards less photogenic species with higher chances of survival outside zoos. Charismatic megafauna—it's the slightly disparaging term given to endangered animals with widespread popular appeal, like the panda, the lion, the great white shark. The panda *is* the logo for the World Wide Fund for Nature, for crying out loud. Their aesthetic appeal attracts money and attention disproportionate to their numbers. But it's true: isn't this the way it always is? It's the way the prettiest women have any number of rich suitors lavishing them with gifts and treats, while everyone else is lamenting their options and left to languish—or put on panda suits.

Is it a strain on our relationship? It's hard to say, because at least we both still get to talk about bears, I guess—though he expects me to listen to him more than he listens to me, because pandas are more *important*. I was miffed and I asked what he meant and he said carefully, Oh all I mean is that they're more endangered.

But well you know, the fact is that the panda sanctuaries have actually unwittingly benefitted a whole lot of animals, including golden monkeys, white-lipped deer, and moon bears. Moon bears live on the same terrain as pandas, but no one's ever going to create a sanctuary for them, so it's a blessing that they get this boon thanks to the cuteness and popularity of the pandas.

My beef is that my boyfriend, he's *only* interested in pandas. Most other ecologists or environmental activists or zoologists or researchers, myself included, we are interested in leveraging on the popularity of the particular charismatic megafauna in question, to raise support for the protection of the entire ecosystem of which that animal is a part. If my boyfriend would just acknowledge this, he could include me into his life. I'd feel like he has a heart for me, for moon bears, for the environment, for the bigger picture.

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The one night my boyfriend spent overnight observing Mei Xiang and Tian Tian at the D.C. zoo, I slept with a white man. I wish I could say I fucked a white man, but I

guess that's something only men get to say. It's so disempowering if I think of it as, I let a white man fuck me, you know? But we can save that for another time. So. It felt so good to not be in that panda suit where I can feel my breath and sweat condensing back onto me through the suit, for my naked body to be looked at and felt all over and worshipped. The white man went down on me—my boyfriend has never done that—and I couldn't stop whimpering. And he lifted his head back up and said, Baby, am I hurting you? And it was all I could do to catch my breath and say, No, just don't stop.

The white man, he's one of the panda species managers—yes, they have shit like that. See, this is one of the ways in which we're so different from the West. We set goals and we don't really care what we have to do to reach them, as long as we reach them, bravo. It's like the pig iron that was produced during the Great Leap Forward by peasants with their scrappy backyard furnaces—and they hit the state-mandated target but the quality was so poor that they couldn't be used for *anything*.

A species manager—which most endangered animals with captive populations have—his or her job is to record the family trees of the animal he or she is in charge of, to analyse pedigree and make breeding recommendations through a measure of genetic rarity and mean kinship. This makes sure that they don't restrict the gene pool when they breed the animal.

Panda breeding-wise, not every male panda is as clueless as Tian Tian: there was this love machine, Pan Pan, who sired more than thirty panda cubs in his youth, and at the D.C. zoo, the panda species manager had told us that sixteen per cent of the genes in the captive panda population in the world are Pan Pan's. This overrepresentation will eventually pose a problem, see, with a loss of gene diversity over generations, which is something that would not happen in the wild. And this in-breeding in captivity might lead each generation of panda cubs to become more and more domesticated or adapted to the captive environment. If the ultimate goal is re-introduction into the wild, this won't do.

I know “manager” is such a corporate word and such an American idea—like you'd think, HR manager, or football club manager—but they've given a whole lot of thought to the process rather than the outcome. It's sad and amazing to see how goal-oriented we Chinese can be, without thinking of the consequences of the process as long as we live up to the target, by hook or by crook. We have this tunnel vision that gives us this tenacity, and true, in a way, that's one of our best traits as Chinese people, the determination to succeed. But what about the blinkers we put on to achieve that singularity of perspective? So what if we have a thousand pandas, seven thousand kilograms of bear bile, fifty million tons of pig iron? Don't we ever remove those blinkers to see that we are destroying a gene pool, or being horrifically cruel to moon bears, or producing worthless iron?

And even then—when we out-perform ourselves, we rarely pause to pat ourselves on the back—instead, we raise our initial target. We're never good enough for ourselves. It's like when I was a kid, and my father—don't go all Freud on me now—said the target was to score eighty marks for all my subjects. And when I did, instead of praising me, he upped the mark to eighty five. And when I did, it became ninety, and then I went crazy because not everything is math and science; you can't force a perfect score in languages or the humanities. But the panda species manager, he kept

praising me, and because of that I found myself crying all the way through—he probably thinks all Chinese women are neurotic now. Well. He kept telling me how smooth my skin was, how pink my tits were, how good my thighs felt. Everything. I didn't even care if it was just a glib tongue, if the words were recycled—because my boyfriend has never praised me during sex.

I try so hard—*I try so hard*—I'm sweating in that panda suit and I was the one who had to make the slit in the crotch so there's a place for my boyfriend's dick to come through, and I was the one who hemmed up the fabric around the slit so it wouldn't unravel, and guess who's the one who has to wash the suit each time after he's had his fun—but he's probably dreaming of Mei Xiang's panda cunt when he's humping me.

No but seriously, it makes me wonder—so if he *could* get jiggy with a panda, would he? Is what he wants, ultimately, to have sex with a panda, and I am just the nearest human proxy fart who's willing to zip up into the panda suit 'cause—at the end of the day, when it's all said and done—I love him? Or does he want me, in the panda suit, and the fetish is just a silly conditional layer, but he sincerely wants *me* just that he's weird that way? And how would I know?

So I told just one friend, one female friend, and you know what she said? At least you won't have to worry about him fantasising about other women. That's when I decided this whole thing is just too bizarre for even my closest friends to patronise me in a manner I find adequate, and I'd have to pay for someone to take me seriously, to respect the situation, to keep a straight face and ask me detached questions, else I'd go crazy. So here I am—and I know I'm paying you so I don't quite need to thank you—but—thanks.

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Last week at the moon bear rescue centre, we got wind of a report that there was a mother bear who escaped her cage in a bile farm, and you know what she did? Before we could get there, she'd strangled her own cub and then killed herself by intentionally running into a wall continuously until her skull cracked. That's how distressed they are and how thoroughly their conditions have broken them.

I came home so upset, and all my boyfriend said was, The world is a cruel place. And I said, if it's such a cruel place, then pandas are meant to go extinct. I'm not trying to say that a zoo is a great place but there they are in a comfortable and secure environment and they won't even *mate*? They fly you in and you and your pals construct little carpentry edifices designed to ergonomically enhance higher chances of penetration, and Tian Tian just stands there and puts on his perplexed panda face? And hundreds of Americans living in D.C. apply as volunteers to sit overnight in a glass-fronted booth to take notes on clipboards, of where Mei Xiang and Tian Tian are taking a piss, and thousands more are watching the panda enclosure webcam at any given time back home?

I really hated him that day, I wanted to leave him, I wanted to be with someone who didn't work with pandas; for pandas, I'd rather he just be some office worker with no specific ideals, rather than ideals I find cheap, even if he's doing a good job of

upholding them. I wanted to be with someone who wouldn't make me put on a panda suit every time we had sex, who desired me and my body the way they are.

But then my boyfriend fixed me a double-boiled fish soup for dinner, and put on a pirated DVD he'd bought over the weekend. It was an American film called Donnie Darko. There's this monstrous looking bunnyman who appears from time to time, and you don't ever know for sure if he is a spectre of Donnie's psyche or an independent character or whatever. And there's this part where Donnie says to him, Why are you wearing that stupid rabbit suit? And the bunnyman says to Donnie without missing a beat, Why are you wearing that stupid man suit?

After the credits rolled, we had sex on the couch. I zipped myself into the panda suit that had been hung to dry in the bathroom and parted the slit in the crotch. My boyfriend got on top of me and started moaning and groaning, and after he came he pressed his full weight down on me, his arms flopped down by his sides. For a little while I couldn't breathe, and that's when I started to get excited. And instead of trying to talk to him, the way I normally would, I began making these high-pitched chirrup at the back of my throat, the way I remembered Mei Xiang making them at the D.C. zoo when she had her paw in her crotch. And my boyfriend, he was so happy. He shot right back up again and he said, Now I know how much you love me. We did it again, and it felt good. The next morning, which was yesterday, he asked me to marry him. I said, I don't know, and he cried. We've been together for seven years, and that's the first time I've ever seen him cry.

And I know you're basically just a stranger, and I know this is just our first session, and I know we have only three minutes left and it is a fifty yuan overtime charge per fifteen minutes once the hour is up, but I want to ask you so many things.

Do you think pandas are cute? Is it perfectly fair that pretty things attract disproportionate attention and money? Have you ever eaten bear paw, and what does it taste like? How many women in the world would put on a panda suit for her boyfriend and how many of them would like it, and how many of them would feel degraded? Is it better if your boyfriend is thinking about another woman when having sex with you, or is it better if he is thinking of a panda? If someone locked a panda up in a 2.6 feet by 4.4 feet by 6.5 feet cage and eked out a hole in its stomach and made it wear an iron vest, what would happen when the world found out? Should I marry my boyfriend? In a manner of pure utilitarian philosophy, is the outcome invariably and unequivocally more important than the process? What does it feel like to sit in your black leather chair and collect money to listen to people tell you the weirdest and saddest things, are you laughing and crying inside all the time? Why are you wearing that stupid man suit?