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Only the Cat Knows

A NOVELLA BY

Ruyan Meng

Winner of the Red Hen Press Novella Award

A powerful and gripping allegory of an ordinary man trying to survive in the oppressive Chinese communist regime of the 1970s.

This harrowing and extraordinary story, based on a true event, is part of a series of tales illuminating the microcosm of all humanity contained in a typical Chinese “worker village.” Here, an exploited young factory worker has nothing to live for beyond a frail chance of a pay raise. When it never happens, he feels trapped between his family and official greed, indifference, and corruption. He then loses a ten-yuan note in a grain shop and turns desperately manic. While burgling the home of his sister, he is caught and accused by his little niece. Horrorstruck, he performs the action that will seal his fate forever . . .

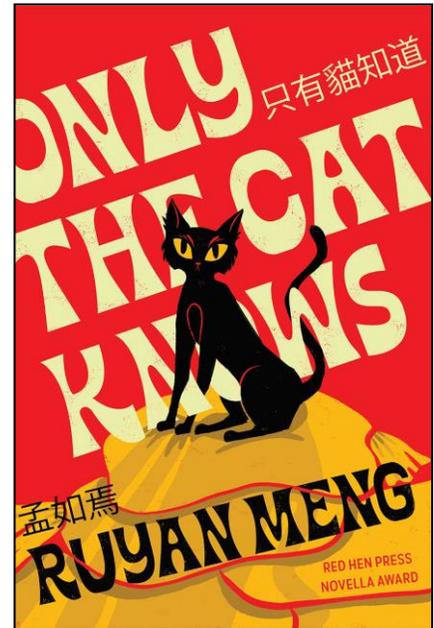
ADVANCE PRAISE

“*Only the Cat Knows* stands out in its depiction of a man trapped by debt and consumed by his sense of inadequacy. This honest portrayal of money and power and the many ways they weigh on our lives is timely and captures the sense of our current times as well as the economic woes that sometimes lead to desperate and tragic ends.”

—**Donna Hemans**, author of *Tea by the Sea*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruyan Meng was born and educated in China. She emigrated to the United States in the early 1990s. During the past decade she has immersed herself in Chinese history from the 1950s to the 1980s—the Stalinist-style oppression enforced by Mao Zedong. Her stories are inspired by true events in a “worker village” of the fifties—a residential compound directly copied from the Soviet Union. In her finely wrought tales, she has recreated this world: in microcosm, all human life is here. Ruyan Meng worked as an entrepreneur and real estate investor for twenty years, in Dallas, Texas. She now writes full-time and practices yoga and meditation.



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FROM ONLY THE CAT KNOWS

Late one evening, after three nights of insomnia, he asked for sleeping pills at a drugstore.

For yourself? the pretty woman asked from behind the counter. The store was otherwise empty, though a clerk sat behind the cashier desk in the corner, nodding off over his newspaper.

Yes, he said. The resonance of medicinal herbs—or his lack of sleep—made his head spin.

One per day for a week, she said, her lips curving blithely. He looked at her while she put white pills from a glass jar into a small paper bag. Her hands were wrinkle-free and well-manicured—a pair of bourgeois hands, the kind any man would wish to touch.

Only seven?

That's all I can give you.

Are they really so strong? he said, pretending casualness.

Yes, this shit is dan-ger-ous, she drawled in an amusing way and then blushed, as if to apologize for her coarseness. He gazed back, thinking, *She's lovely.*

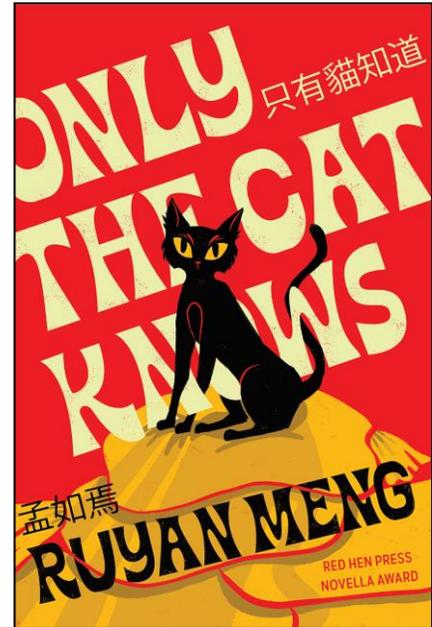
How many does it take? he asked, attempting to detain her longer.

For what?

You know what I mean.

Uh, oh!—her mouth remained half open as she suddenly realized. She hesitated, then: Ten, maybe fifteen? Why do you want to know?

I'm—inquisitive. He charmed her with a smile and left.



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