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I wish I had been painted by Millais. Maybe not as Ophelia in a tepid bath. Perhaps as Lady Macbeth. Or Titania. Or Portia. Not Brutus' Portia. Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*. I used to make you sit on a little wooden stool and pretend you were painting me. Stroke after stroke rasping against the canvas. I would unravel my strawberry plaits and stare at you. Sherry eyes. Corsage at my neck. Picking up the small crumbs of wedding cake and passing them through my gold ring. Nine times. But you still didn't get the hint. And so I am suspended in that moment. Forever bridesmaid. I can't be your Effie or your Ruskin. So blot out the canvas with grey. Euphemia's hagiography turns on a wheel and a bear, but I can't be your martyr. Writhing in my skin, I call out to Rossetti to paint me. I make you call me Guggums and cling to wild heartsease. We both know the laudanum comes later. So you paint me. Regina Cordium. Hooded lids. Heart shaped pendant. There are two still babies in the shadows. One within and one without. Broken hearted, I become your posthumous Beatrice. Dig me up Dante! Exhume me. Consume me. Shift the soil between us and gather me in your arms. Chase your journal of poems around my coffin with your fingertips as you hold me. Let me hear your mew of pleasure when you have it. At last. My copper hair fills the empty space. But the worm's hole in your journal eats away at your heart.

Cassandra Atherton