



Prufrock's lover

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Cassandra Atherton

I can't do this any more. Not even for you. Not even for the McDonald's Happy Meal you buy me after we have sex every Saturday afternoon. Do you know I only eat the cookies? Do you know that I drop the fries down the holes in the sink when you aren't looking? I drop them one by one. Not two by two like Noah's animals. On their own. Solitary. Lone.

Loaning your copy of *The Waste Land* to anyone who will take it. You tell me to stick to Ovid. I tell you to proof-read Prufrock and draft a new ending for us. You kiss me and still, behind your back, I drop each fry down the sink. They slide down. Plunge feet first. Or is it head first into the grimy blackness? Do fries like to be treated like boxes? This end up. I choose each hole randomly and drop them from a three centimetre height. Sometimes they graze the circumference and tiny grains of salt cling to the copper. I can't decide if I am the fry or the salt in this metaphor. Maybe I'm the glossy red cardboard packet. Waxy. Wax on. Wax off. *The Karate Kid*. Or maybe I'm really Buffy in that *Tabula Rasa* episode. You can be my 'Watcher' because it was Giles in the Library with the sword. I have so much to learn. Cluedo. Clueless. Whatever. You tell me that you will teach me but I am not sure if I want to be you. If I want to make love to you. With love etched into my knuckles. Or eyelids. I'm Pandora or Narcissus. When you make love to me you watch your reflection in my dilated pupils. Your breath fogs up my neck like a mirror. And when you shower I rummage through your sock drawer. Exposing your secrets. Reading the contents of your ark of the covenant.

Your dog's getting fat because I feed him my junior burgers. He spits out the pickles and occasionally they get stuck on the roof of his mouth like the host does at mass and I have to curl them off for him with my index finger. You think it's OK because a fat dog is evidence of a generous owner. Glutinous. Gluts. Gluten-free. I think a fat dog is evidence of lack of control. This could explain why you shake when I wrap my legs around your waist.

Eventually it must come down to this: I like *pina coladas* and getting caught in the rain and I like making love at midnight. I think the penis song in *The Sweetest Thing* is funny. I have *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Flashdance* and *Footloose* and *Fosse* on DVD. And you like *The Bill* and *Parkinson* on Saturday night and my toes undoing your fly.

'A little higher,' you beg when the lights go out, but I am thinking the same thing. I want to say 'Raise the Titanic' but I wait. My mouth only centimetres from your cock. Three seconds. Your hands on the back of my head. Gently at first. Then forcefully.

'MMMMM,' I part say, part hum.

'What are you doing?' he asks with a smile in his voice.

'Just trying something out,' I say with my mouth full and then worry that he will think I have no manners or that I study the Karma Sutra and collect men in my dresser drawer.

'Well stop, I like it quiet, darling'.

'Darling,' I repeat it once aloud and then twenty times in my head. I will do anything for him now. Just to hear that word. Just to have that word attached to me. You watch the flash of my eyes as I lower myself onto you. I have to cock my head to one side so you can see the next guest on the now muted *Parkinson*. I don't mind. I am your darling.

You flood out of me and I have a big wet patch on the back of my pink skirt. It doesn't matter. It will dry hard and stiff but I don't want to move. Not just yet. In the post-coital silence I watch your chest rise and fall. My chest is red. It feels like fruit tingles are dancing just under the first layer of my epidermis. Spinning on their sides. Like ten cent pieces across my nana's mahogany table top. In the kitchen. Orange chairs. Green laminex. Like a first degree burn. Salve. Salvation. Damnation. Mortal sin. Not venial. Or menial. Megre. Meagre.

I sing to you after sex. Whole arias. Silent. They mingle with your sperm in my throat. As if I swallowed my fish lamp. And it is rotating inside me. Churning. Agitating. You read to me. From *Moby Dick*. Always *Moby Dick*, never *Pinocchio* or *Peter Pan*. I try to tell you about Moby the DJ and his great-great-great grand uncle. But you hush me again. It is your silence. I am loath to break it. It's enough that you love me because I am young. It doesn't really matter if I could be anyone. I'm not anyone. I am occasionally Emily Dickinson. But the difference is that I can dance on my toes. Life is 'full as opera'. But only if it is *La Boheme* and I have red hair and am the protagonist.

I wish I could record our dialogue. Or, more accurately, your soliloquies but I am usually so tired that it is just your voice I hear. Curling around the curve of my left ear as you spoon me. Sometimes I think I say your name. But I mustn't because if I name you I will become attached to you. If I name you then you will become a permanent fixture in my life. Until you leave me. Until someone else lies in your wet patch and listens to you read from Melville.

Your skin is crepe-y on your neck. Strawberry crepes with pureed strawberries. Why don't you ever see banana crepes on a menu? Warm, thick banana. I think about asking you but it's late and my toes have gone to sleep between your ankles. In the jade night I can almost believe you love me.

Cassandra Atherton is a Melbourne writer and balletomane. 