

I'd met this man at a bar, very drunk. 'You've been accepted,' I said, leaning on him like a flirty girl as the credit card payment for his petty whisky (aged in port barrels for an exceptional woody finish, he later educated me) went through. 'Who are you?' he said, shaking his head in disbelief. I laughed – drunk and confused by the question.

The dress I was wearing to this man's house for our first dinner was made of a seventies-brown polyester that excreted an opportunity-shop musk. I felt trapped inside an artificial skin, a sausage casing tightly confining my nervous, horny, sweaty body.

# I'M OBSESSED WITH YOU

GEORGE TITHERIDGE

'You look good on my couch,' he said, and judging by his smitten expression, I was clearly an object of aesthetic pleasure in harmony with his retro furniture. 'Honestly, I didn't think you'd actually come tonight.'

'Me neither,' I said truthfully. 'But I came.'

'Oh, you will,' he giggled. We both giggled. We were both pretty gross. He made handmade pasta for us, and I was impressed. I'd never met someone who made fresh pasta before; my last boyfriend slept on a mattress on the floor, practised stick and pokes on me, and smoked weed out of apple bong. Over our meal, this man said things that offered glimmers of a life that had lived longer and more excitingly than

mine. He told me about his Master's thesis, *Nocturnal Landscapes and the Alternative Noise Scene of Montreal in the Nineteen Nineties*, and said he would email it to me to read as 'homework'.

'I prefer to cook for other people rather than eat other people's food,' he said as he grated some more parmesan on my plate. 'Last Christmas, I was with some of my colleagues from the university. The woman hosting us was clueless and served us guacamole from a jar. Guacamole from a jar! I couldn't believe it.'

I laughed, even though I'd never been rich enough to buy a fresh avocado.

He shook his head at me like he could hear my inner thoughts. 'What are we doing?'

'Eating dinner,' I said.

'You're half my age.'

'So, what. I'm legal.'

'You're going to be trouble,' he laughed. Then he repeated the *who are you?* thing, and I still didn't get why he was dramatising the situation so much. I was the actress here.

'What's your star sign?' I asked in my first swing at a thrilling new topic.

'Gemini.'

'Oh no,' I said, worried.

'You know Gaddafi was a Gemini.'

'I'm a Gemini, and I'm pretty sure two Geminis together is a bad thing.'

'My best friend, who's also an academic, had a much younger lover than him too.'

'You guys into that?' I teased.

He ignored me. 'He was an idiot, though. He kept it from his wife.' He then looked seriously at the large wooden pepper grinder between us instead of me. 'The girl went crazy with jealousy. One night, she came to his house to expose their affair. She was screaming his name, yelling, *I LOVE YOU! DON'T*

*IGNORE ME!* God, I'm cringing for her just thinking about it.'

He then described how his best friend and his best friend's wife watched as the girl humiliated herself further by howling, begging and ugly crying at the bottom of their stairs like a child refusing to go to bed and brush their teeth at night. 'Poor thing, she was obsessed. It was really bad, but she never had a chance. He's a happily married man; they're the best couple I know,' he enthused. 'I told him this affair with the girl was doomed. Cursed from the start.'

I added more pepper to the pasta. It needed something.

'It's already seasoned,' he said, looking slightly offended.

'I just love pepper.'

'Anyway,' he continued. 'In his defence, he told her he was married, that he loved his wife, and that this was a bit of fun. Okay, so he didn't say it explicitly, but it was implied. The thing was, he couldn't help himself. And why should he? He just happened to love his wife as much as he did eating out this girl's pussy in his lunch breaks.'

After dinner, he got a tin of Canadian maple syrup from the fridge, which he offered up as dessert. First, he gave me a brief lecture on the majestic maple trees of Canada and how the sap was extracted lovingly from the trees like liquid gold. He then pierced a hole in the tin with a Swiss army knife, filled his mouth with the liquid like a priest at Mass, and then spat it into my own. I felt like a bird sucking precious nectar from a grown man's beak. This was a first for me – it must have been a Canadian move. I was really sweating now – into his couch and his sheets – as he made me cum eight times (he counted) by eating out my pussy. It was obscene. It was like an amateur porno. This is how

grown-ups fuck, I thought. No one's ever done it this good.

And so, (you're probably familiar with this story) after that night, I became obsessed with this man. Infatuated like his friend's mistress and the many wide-eyed art-student mistresses before me. Only, this man wasn't married. He didn't want a family; he wanted cats like me. He wanted me. I didn't believe we were doomed. We were the exception to the cliché.

One night a few months later, after he pulled out so I wouldn't get pregnant and I finished him off with my hand, he admitted that earlier that night he had lied about having work to do. He said he'd waited for me to fall asleep before coming to bed because he didn't feel like having sex. But he was glad we did it because he felt better. He then

remembered a story about a friend whose mother had killed herself by shutting herself in a closet, setting up an extension cord, and slitting her throat with an electric bread knife. 'I have a dark sense of humour,' he laughed. Then he fell asleep on his back and snored. I looked over at his open mouth and the ominous sound coming from his insides. It's incredible what humans can ignore in order to still find a person attractive.

But how could I sleep now? I got up to pee so I wouldn't get a UTI. I looked in his medicine cabinet for information, but it was creepily sparse, except for a nose trimmer and some Clinique Happy perfume. I saw my reflection in his very clean mirror. 'Look at you!' I said. 'You're obsessed. You're doomed.' Of course, it was more embarrassing for me than for him.