

**Cassandra Atherton**

OR

You, with your initials like a wave on my page, are green. Jade green. Though it has always seemed a paradox to me that jade can be green. Maybe it's because you lead multiple lives. Like six and nine. Or a European seven and a four. Or the word 'shell' on my calculator.

I have tried to teach you that prose is similar to a rose. Like the labyrinthine passages of the internal ear with its subterranean channels. Like Auden being recited at the bottom of a stairwell.

It's next Tuesday and you are stuck in the stationery section of the supermarket with empty pockets and a White Wings cake mix. You want to buy all the green notebooks at \$1.99 each but you know they will replenish the stock when you leave. You can never have them all. Somewhere, someone else will be using one of your green notebooks. For school or to record their bank balance. Or for recipes and telephone numbers.

I write the word 'concubine' in the condensation and lay my heart on a towel on the floor in front of the bath. But you have a shower and shake yourself dry. You shave in the 'u' and miss three hairs on your cheek. I'd tell you but I'll let her tell you instead.

You, with your cornerless copy of *Novel and Yellow Paper*, are in love with a stranger. Or at least you think it's love. For now. Until she leaves you for an effete aesthete or an architect. Either way, she'll aim for someone more purple.

Turn off the light. I won't mind if you pretend I'm her. Or if you close your eyes when you dance inside me. And I won't mind if you pick up your paintbrush. Provided that you paint in the pink and leave out the green.

Oberon popped out of my thesis and asked me, "Don't you wish you were Penelope Lively?" And I thought, for that moment, how wonderful it would be.

You, with the tired dictionary, know one hundred words beginning with 'z' but all I know is zealous.

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