

How Do I Love Thee?

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Characters

KATHY.....Attractive, twenty thirty something single woman

CAMERON.....Attractive, twenty thirty something single man

MOOKIE.....Sophisticated, handsome, adult Siamese cat

Setting

Present day Harlem, New York City inside KATHY's one bedroom apartment. There is a living room, exposed kitchen, and a bathroom. KATHY and MOOKIE are sitting together on the sofa. The doorbell rings. KATHY and MOOKIE go to the door. Enter CAMERON. CAMERON "over affectionately" for a first date greets KATHY.

MOOKIE

Who is he and what's he doing here?

(MOOKIE walks around Cameron sniffing him.)

MOOKIE

I thought you ordered Asian Fusion take out. I wanted sesame noodles.

CAMERON

You didn't tell me you had a cat.

(MOOKIE runs around the apartment.)

MOOKIE

This is our private time together. Middle of the week, time to chill. I don't want him in here.

KATHY

Are you allergic?

CAMERON

No...but you didn't come off to me like a "cat lady."

(MOOKIE stands in front of KATHY.)

MOOKIE

KATHY...I'm not feeling good about this one. Please get rid of him.

KATHY

Settle down MOOKIE.

(KATHY grabs MOOKIE and tries to calm him.)

KATHY

I'm sorry...he's a very mellow cat. This is unusual for him.

CAMERON

Maybe you can shut him up in the bathroom while we have our time together.

MOOKIE

Locked in the bathroom in my own house. Who does he think he is? KATHY...
This guy is trouble...get rid of him...please...

KATHY

Come in CAMERON.

(KATHY indicates to CAMERON that he should sit on the sofa. MOOKIE runs over to the sofa and sits there first.)

MOOKIE

This is my space. You sit over there on Auntie's chair.

(CAMERON sits next to MOOKIE on the sofa. KATHY takes MOOKIE to Auntie's chair then she sits next to CAMERON on the sofa.)

KATHY

Be a good kitty. Sit on Auntie's chair.

MOOKIE

I don't want to sit on Auntie's Kate's chair. It still smells like Auntie.

KATHY

He'll settle down. I only put him away when my guests have allergies.

(MOOKIE goes back to the sofa and sits between KATHY and CAMERON.)

CAMERON

I should have said I was allergic.

KATHY

Relax.

CAMERON

I don't have pets and I never understood people who treat their animals like people.

KATHY

MOOKIE isn't a pet.

MOOKIE

That's right...tell him.

KATHY

He's an animal companion. He's part of my family and I treat him with love and kindness.

MOOKIE

School him KATHY.

(Pause)

Animal hater!

(KATHY hugs and kisses MOOKIE.)

KATHY

Just give him a few minutes.

(KATHY stands up. MOOKIE taps KATHY on her butt. KATHY walks towards the kitchen. MOOKIE paces behind CAMERON who has remained seated on the sofa.)

MOOKIE

In a few minutes you're gonna be outta here sucker.

KATHY

He's so loving. He won't harm you.

MOOKIE

No...I won't harm you but I'm thinking about it and I'm thinking hard about it brother.

KATHY

What about a drink CAMERON? Red, white, or beer?

MOOKIE
Get the red wine sucker.

CAMERON
I'll have red wine.

MOOKIE
Yes!

KATHY
Merlot okay?

CAMERON
That's fine.

MOOKIE
Enjoy your wine while you can...you're on your way out.

CAMERON
Why are you so attached to this cat?

MOOKIE
Attached? She loves me.

KATHY
Attached? Didn't you have pets growing up?

CAMERON
Actually, we had a dog. Kept him tied up in the yard. More like a yard dog. Kept people from breaking in the house.

MOOKIE
I knew it. User! Abuser!

KATHY
So you didn't have a relationship with your dog.

CAMERON
Not really. I don't remember the dog's name. Maybe we called him dog. The only thing I remember about that dog is his loud, angry bark and throwing bones and table scrapes at him after dinner.

KATHY
That's sad.

CAMERON

There's nothing sad about it. The dog watched the yard.

MOOKIE

That's cruel even for dog enemies.

KATHY

Sad because you lost an opportunity for companionship. Don't you regret that you missed an opportunity for a relationship with your dog?

CAMERON

Time out cat lady in disguise.

KATHY

I'm not a stereotypical cat lady. I have one cat.

MOOKIE

No respect. This is our house. You need to get the hell outta here.

(KATHY pours the wine and gives a glass to CAMERON.)

KATHY

I recognize that it's important to bring love in your life with every opportunity.

MOOKIE

I love you too baby.

KATHY

MOOKIE has been my animal companion since last December when I found him on 116th Street and Lenox.

MOOKIE

KATHY, I don't want him to know our companion story. He won't understand.

KATHY

I was walking home from the 116th Street subway stop on Lenox and I heard the MOST sorrowful cry coming from behind the garbage cans next to the supermarket.

MOOKIE

I didn't know anything about life on the streets. I was lost; I had been living with Josie.

KATHY

I was anxious to get home, it had started to snow but I was compelled to follow the whimpers.

MOOKIE

Josie was a nice lady but she was a distinguished professor of English Literature and on a lecture circuit for her new book about Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She was rushing to get the bus to La Guardia airport. I followed her to the door to kiss her goodbye and she locked me out of the apartment. I followed her outside the building ...she didn't see me....she was running for the bus. I'd never been outside of the apartment, so many people, so much noise... dogs without leashes....I was terrified....

KATHY

Then I found him. There was something familiar about his face, so handsome.

MOOKIE

When I lived with Josie I learned to love poetry. I began to find reciting poetry comforting when I was alone. I began to recite my favorite poet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Josie was an expert on the Victorian era. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

KATHY

A Siamese cat without a collar.

MOOKIE

You caressed my face and you began to recite my favorite poem.

KATHY

I was drawn to this cat. My Aunt taught me how comforting poetry can be. There I was behind some garage pails on 116th Street reciting poetry to a cat I found on the street.

KATHY & MOOKIE

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need...*

KATHY

It was magical...

MOOKIE

It was love at first sight. I loved Josie too. It was then that I realized that although Josie loved me, my life was empty. Most days I spent with a scratch pad and a long-term feeder while Josie traveled on her lecture tour. I was loved but I was lonely.

KATHY

I took him home. After a month of posted notices in the neighborhood with no reply, I accepted him as my companion. His name, MOOKIE...cute...worked.

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MOOKIE

We all make sacrifices. My given name was Bartolommeo. I couldn't tell her and break her heart.

CAMERON

MOOKIE...sounds like Pookie, or Poop.

(KATHY and MOOKIE look at each other
and then look at CAMERON.)

MOOKIE

I never knew loving two people was possible. I still love Josie. Being honest I have to admit that her long distance love wasn't fulfilling my needs. KATHY and I have a friendship and a mutually supportive loving relationship.

CAMERON

If it's a full blooded breed you can sell him for some nice cash.

(KATHY and MOOKIE look at each other
and then look at CAMERON.)

KATHY

Aren't we going to dinner?

CAMERON

Let's kick back for a while.

KATHY

I'll get some light snacks to have with the wine.

CAMERON

Cool.

MOOKIE

He has bad intentions. Don't give him the good snacks.

KATHY

You want some French Brie and sardines MOOKIE?

(MOOKIE goes to the kitchen counter and
nibbles.)

MOOKIE

Love these wild caught sardines. Just a few pieces of cheese for me...I think I may be lactose intolerant.

CAMERON

No cat food?

KATHY

I don't give him processed food and he takes vitamins.

MOOKIE

That's why I'm healthy and strong.

(Pause)

Strong enough to kick your ass.

(MOOKIE flexes his arm muscles.)

MOOKIE

Look at this. Let's arm-wrestle chump.

KATHY

My Aunt Katherine, I'm named after her, passed away last year.

MOOKIE

Auntie Kate wouldn't have like you.

KATHY

We were close. She had a long struggle with lung cancer.

MOOKIE

Smoked cigars like a chimney and chewed tobacco. I never told Kathy but she smoked Weed with her knitting circle at Morningside Park.

KATHY

After she passed, MOOKIE helped me grieve.

MOOKIE

Remember, she had a long, good, happy life KATHY. Your grief was because you missed her.

KATHY

MOOKIE would sit on my lap and I would read Aunt Kate's poetry. She was a published poet but my favorite poems were the poems that never made it out of her hand written journals.

(Pause)

She had references to marijuana in some of her notes...not sure why.

MOOKIE

Leave it alone KATHY. I loved Auntie Kate. I just didn't like the way she smelled.

KATHY

Aunt Kate was a romantic. She wrote love poems.

MOOKIE

Soulful poems about for real love...like my love for KATHY and her love for me.

CAMERON

I can't get into poetry. I like spoken word.

KATHY

Spoken word is poetry lifted off the page with performance making the dead words alive...

(Pause)

KATHY

She loved Motown music. Whenever my Uncle Malachi wanted Aunt Kate to forgive him for something he would sing "My Girl" by the Temptations.

MOOKIE

Classic...

I've got sunshine on a cloudy day

When it's cold outside, I got the month of May.

(MOOKIE begins to do his version of Temptations choreography.)

I even have the moves.

(MOOKIE does a special Temptations like movement.)

You can't touch this chump.

KATHY

Do you know those tunes...like... "My Guy" by Mary Wells?

Nothing you could do could make me untrue to my guy...my guy...

MOOKIE & KATHY

Nothing you could say could make me stay away from my girl...

CAMERON

Old school is okay.

(Cameron gets up from the sofa and aggressively caresses KATHY as she prepares the wine and snacks in the kitchen.)

CAMERON

So how do you like it?

KATHY

Like what?

CAMERON

You know...on top...on the bottom...behind...with toys...?

(KATHY pushes CAMERON away.)

KATHY

A little fast for me. We just met.

MOOKIE

I knew it...a dog...a human dog...I could smell your doggieness before you walked through the door. He's a dog. Get rid of him.

CAMERON

I don't believe in wasting time.

MOOKIE

He tied his dog up with ropes and threw scrapes at it. What do you think he wants to do to you KATHY?

(CAMERON picks up his glass of wine.)

CAMERON

You have a great body...you're sexy...you invited me over...

KATHY

I wanted to get to know you...I don't know you...

(MOOKIE pushes CAMERON.
CAMERON spills wine on himself and on Aunt Kate's chair.)

MOOKIE

You're outta here now dog.

KATHY

MOOKIE!

CAMERON

My pants! Dam cat! How am I gonna get this stain out.

MOOKIE

What about Auntie Kate's chair?

KATHY

I'm sorry. MOOKIE is agitated...I don't know why.

MOOKIE

Because he's a dog.

KATHY

He's really a sweet, loving cat.

CAMERON

Got anything that will take this stain out?

MOOKIE

He's only concerned about his clothes. What about Auntie Kate's chair? He should be apologizing.

(Pause)

Dog!

(Kathy gets a bottle from a kitchen cabinet.
She gives CAMERON the bottle and a rag.)

KATHY

This red wine stain remover is pretty good. The bathroom is on the left.

(CAMERON takes the items and goes into
the bathroom. MOOKIE follows him and
waits outside of the bathroom door and
listens as CAMERON talks on his cell
phone.)

CAMERON

Yeah, we can meet up and do some scouting...This is a waste of time here. Her body is wavy but she's not giving up anything fast and I'm not interested in waiting. Check this out...she treats her cat like a person, serious cat chick...

MOOKIE

Dogs are all alike.

(CAMERON exits the bathroom.)

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CAMERON

KATHY, I need to head back to my place and change my pants.

KATHY

Sure, how soon will you be back?

(MOOKIE pushes and scratches
CAMERON.)

KATHY

MOOKIE?

MOOKIE

Don't come back.

CAMERON

Aw...Lets hook up another time.

KATHY

At least let me clean that scratch up for you.

(Kathy turns away from CAMERON and
MOOKIE in order to get the first aid kit
from the kitchen cabinet. MOOKIE attacks
CAMERON. CAMERON kicks MOOKIE.
KATHY turns around with the first aid kit as
Cameron is kicking MOOKIE.)

KATHY

CAMERON, What are you doing? He's only a frightened cat.

(MOOKIE runs behind KATHY.)

MOOKIE

Verbal abuse...physical abuse...I shouldn't be mistreated in my own home.

CAMERON

You and your cat together ...a little weird for me.

KATHY

Why did you come over here?

CAMERON

You invited me...remember...

KATHY

I invited you for... You've got the wrong girl.

MOOKIE

You've got the wrong girl.

CAMERON

Do yourself a favor... You're never gonna get a man unless you ditch that crazy cat.

(KATHY opens the door. CAMERON exits.
KATHY sits on the sofa holding MOOKIE.)

MOOKIE

Love is love and mean is mean. He was mean KATHY. You and I deserve better.

KATHY

Still hungry. Take out Asian Fusion.

MOOKIE

Yes! That delivery guy...he's a nice man.. You should give him a chance KATHY.

KATHY

Love comes when you're not looking or maybe when you're looking. MOOKIE. I looked behind those garbage pails and found love. I found you.

MOOKIE

I'm going to curl up next to you baby.

KATHY

How do I love thee?

(MOOKIE & KATHY recite the poem with
a spoken word style. Lights fade.)

MOOKIE & KATHY

Let me count the ways. I love thee...

(Lights Out)
(End of Play)