



GOOD: Uncrunchable author Karen Moline becoming lurid over her own lunch

Spicy legend in her own Lunch time

Lust and love among the luvvies

BY VAL HENNESSY

SEX, power and degradation. Phew! These, according to Karen Moline, are the themes of her scorching new novel *Lunch*.

They are also the topics she is discussing at the top of her rather loud American voice over lunch at a very smart restaurant in London's Holland Park.

"Some guys can walk into a room and send a spasm of pure lust through the assembled females," she declares, tucking enthusiastically into her char-grilled calves' liver and heedless of the fact that her fellow diners have all suddenly gone quiet.

"These living gods — film stars, rock stars whatever — can take their pick of beautiful women who will do anything — and I mean anything — just to get close to someone famous."

Moline should know. As a reporter she has hung out for years on the New York celebrity circuit "getting close" (but not that close) while growing disenchanted.

Celebrities, she insists, are a pain. They are overpaid, over-sexed, overvalued and the bizarre and kinky things they get up to would — well — fill a red-hot, palpitating novel. Yet the public showers them with adoration. It allows, as Moline points out, these "rampaging monsters" to get away with almost everything.

"No one ever says 'no' to these people. A lot of them have hardly any talent or brains or personality. They become incapable of having tender, loving relationships. It is this aspect I am exploring in *Lunch*. I am asking what happens to the sexual charismatic when someone dares to say 'no'."

"Personally I can't understand why we go on hero-worshipping showbiz types. The true hero is, for example, the woman who fixed the Hubble Telescope. What I want to know is why should trashy celebs get paid so much?"

Why indeed. And why should writers of trashy sex books also get paid so much, while real writers live on baked beans in garrets?

"That's a good question," concedes Moline, darting me a wary look, and pushing aside the calves' liver, "I guess it's all to do with being marketable."

"Sure, I was paid over six figures for my book. Sure, there's some bondage and sado-masochism in it. Well OK, there's a lot of bondage and sado-masochism in it, but only someone without a lot of imagination will describe it as a sex book."

And all this with fellow American,

feminist lawyer Catharine MacKinnon, railing against pornography last week during a tour for her book *Only Words*.

Moline herself would describe *Lunch* — and she does with the ears of 50 diners flapping so hard that you can almost feel the draught — as an "erotic" book. She pronounces the word as if it's spelt with a "U".

"When my novel was nearly finished I joined a class called the *Erutic Element in Modern Literature*. I wanted to learn what makes a book *Erutic*, and soon realised I'd hit it instinctively."

"Then a funny thing happened. I asked my professor to read it, he did, and arranged a meeting after class. So I'm sitting there crazy to get some professional feedback and he says, 'So tell me about your life.'"

"Was I crushed! I'm expecting some academic criticism, and he's making *erutic* advances at me, titillated by the fact that his student had written something that turned him on."

Frankly it is difficult to imagine Moline crushed. Everything about her — voice, scarlet nails, spiky hair, huge flashing eyes, maroon lipstick, flamboyant designer clothes — screams that she's of an uncrunchable disposition.

Moline explains that the idea and title for *Lunch* came to her like a thunderclap as she sat in a restaurant being ogled by a "sexually charismatic" stranger.

He ruined her appetite. No doubt against her will, "desire tickled its pinpricks of cravings up her spine" like it does for her heroine in the first chapter, but Moline ignored the tickles, and yet another steamy blockbuster was born.

Suggest that the very notion of some bloke reaching for a cat-o-nine-tails at the crucial moment makes most women fall about laughing, and she falls about laughing herself. "I am glad you say that," she chortles, "but some women go for it."

In *Lunch* she describes the phenomenon as "the rip tide of sex" which sometimes "sucks you under before you've got a chance to think, and when you surface you've been pulled far out to sea, bobbing and adrift." Yes.

Lunch is full of similar purple passages. It is also exceedingly boring. This comes as a surprise after you've met its turbo-charged author.

My theory is that Moline found writing the "erutic" bits a chore and realised that a real writer with important things to say was struggling to get hold of the pen.

I am looking forward to her next book. In the meantime let's hope she hasn't made too many enemies in New York. She's a nice, wild and wonderful woman. Shame about the book.

● *Lunch* (Macmillan, £9.99).

‘Desire tickled its pinpricks of cravings up her spine’

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