

# *Lonely Hearts*

JOAN FURLONG

"It's THE LATE marriages that's the ruin of Ireland," said Sean in Ryan's pub. "Look at the way the birth-rate keeps falling."

"The trouble is the men all want dowries with the woman."

"No, the trouble is all Irishmen have Oedipus complexes. They prefer their mothers."

"I wouldn't believe in it at all!" said a dark-haired young man.

"Wouldn't believe in what?"

"Marriage."

"For shame! And you a civil servant with a pension one day, and a grand farm way down in Wicklow. Sure, you're the very one that ought to be married this long time!"

"I'd prefer me freedom."

The boy with the Bryl Creme and the sacking apron slopped the drinks down on the counter.

"What's the matter, Tony?" the man with the ginger moustache asked him. "Girl friend let you down?"

"I wouldn't be bothered with them."

"There, you see!" said the young man. "He agrees with me."

John Joe Phelan set down his glass of Paddy thoughtfully. "I mind the time," he said, "when Festy and meself (you remember old Festy?) put an ad in the Lonely Hearts column of the *Mail*. Sure, 'twas only for sport that I did it; but I'm not above half sure that Festy wasn't in earnest. We were only young lads at the time, and we hadn't got much money. We split the cost of the ad between us. 'Twas meself that

worded it. 'Well educated, refined young man of good appearance desires meet young lady 20-35. View above.'

"Well, by Monday there were a stack of letters for us. Festy was sorting them out, looking at the postmarks. Some of them were on grand note-paper too, blue and cream and some were scented, but he kept all them for himself, and he was for giving me all the dirty, crumpled-looking envelopes from Kimmage and Crumlin and the North Strand. Well, boys, Your Man had a good read through the lot, and finally he picked up a Jane who lived in Baggot Street, nice and handy near his digs, and there were a couple from England he answered as well. The ones in England had grand-sounding names altogether, one was called Lavender Williams, and the other was called Olga something and said she had a Russian grandmother. He started off writing to the two of them.

"In the meantime, of course, he was meeting the one in Baggot Street. It turned out she was about forty-five, and plain at that, but she had a little confectionery and tobacco shop, and Your Man made a good thing out of it for a time, getting loans off her on the promise of marriage. He kept right on with the letters to Olga and Lavender at the same time. Indeed, he got so far as to ask the two of them to marry him. I suppose he never thought they'd both accept. He always had it that Lavender was the best-looking, and he had some grand snaps of her he showed me; but this Olga was the daughter of a sea captain, and I suppose he decided that she was a better bet financially, so he picked her. In the meantime Lavender had bought her trousseau and her wedding dress and veil. I believe she had some class of a nervous breakdown when he never turned up to marry her, and of course she sued him for breach of promise. But Festy was over here, and what he always used to say to me: 'Sure,

there's nothing like a little strip of blue water.'

"Well, this Olga, she said she'd marry him all right, but it all had to be kept a secret, because her family were very respectable, and they'd never have let her marry some one they didn't know. She agreed to meet Festy in Dublin, and they were to get married the day she arrived. Festy had a place down the country too, Currakileen was the name of it, way down in Galway, and they were to go there for the honeymoon. Well, Your Woman duly arrived, and Festy told me that when he saw her he did get a bit of a turn. She was rather on the heavy side, but on the whole she wasn't too bad-looking, and she was young. They got spliced that morning when she came off the boat. He took her for a bit of lunch, and then they went off to Galway by the afternoon train.

"I fancy she got a shock when she saw the place. I was there meself, oncet ever, and sure 'twas all tumbling down. There was Festy's old father, and a couple of brothers, one of them was a bit cracked and the other was only a kid. The poor mother was in the County Asylum; she's been dead this long time, God rest her. I suppose 'twas all what you'd be calling a *bit unconventional*. Anyhow, Your Woman never really settled down there somehow. Finally she persuaded Festy to sell up the place and bring her back to Dublin. They had a little two-roomed flat near Kelly's Corner, and they knocked out a good enough time while the money lasted. I used to drop in to see them. She wasn't a beauty, but she had nice eyes and hair, and she was very gay and full of high spirits.

"Before the year was out herself and Festy were always at one another. Of course the money was all gone by this time. Festy did get a job, but he lost it after a month or two, and she went to work in a cake shop to help out. She was very hard-working, the

poor thing, but when she'd come home in the evening, Festy would be still sitting in the chair—if he wasn't off to the pub—and the bed not made, nor the washing-up done. Ah, sure, it broke the poor girl's heart. She wasn't strong anyway. In the end, her family persuaded her to go home."

"What happened to Festy? Did he miss her?"

"Faith and he did then! I used to be sick from listening to him talking about her, and getting me to write letters telling her he was sick and asking her to come back."

"Did she come?"

"She came but once; and when she found he wasn't sick at all, but just coddling, she went back home again."

"What did Festy do?"

"Well the poor fellow got mixed up in bad company. Some kind of a man who was a fence, and Festy was a kind of a partner in the business. He said he was only a sleeping partner. Anyway, the judge said that sleeping or waking, it was all one, and poor Festy was inside for a spell. 'Twas while he was inside that he learned the Spanish. He was always a great fist at the Irish. He had a gift for learnin'. When

he came out, sure he got a job in Spain—fruit exporting or something. He did well, too. 'Twas only last Christmas I got a letter from him and a lovely card. He said he was having a great time with the *senoritas*. He told me he was after getting a divorce from Olga and that he was going to marry one of them."

"What happened to Olga?" Sean asked him.

"She lived on at home with her people. I heard she had a bad heart. Sure, 'twas no wonder!"

"You didn't meet your own wife through the ad?"

"Faith then, I didn't fancy any of them ones—writing letters like that. Ah no! I met me own wife nice and decent at a hurling match, and a grand woman she is too."

"It doesn't seem to have been a great success, you and Festy as *Lonely Hearts*."

John Joe Phelan paused while he signalled for Tony.

"What'll you have?" he asked Sean.

"Same again."

"Same again, and another large Paddy. The trouble with them poor girls", he said weightily, "was that they had no *MODESTY*!"

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## *A Farewell to Eros*

J. M. LALLEY

**The New People: Desexualization in American Life**, by Charles E. Winick, *New York: Pegasus, 1968.* 384 pp. \$7.50.

"UNSEX ME HERE!" cried Lady Macbeth, calling on the dark and deadly spirits to help her suppress the womanly qualities, such as gentleness and compassion, that might stand in the way of her ambition and resolve. This is also what Professor Winick, a Freudian sociologist and anthropologist, seems to mean by "desexualization;" he does not consider it as necessarily responsible for all the murderous violences of our time, but he thinks it has much to do with the popular indifference to violence, as was illustrated in the case of Kitty Genovese, murdered within the sight or hearing of some dozens of persons, not one of whom attempted to help her or even bothered to call the police.

Their extraordinary non-response is usually attributed to a desire not to get involved. Why don't people want to be involved with each other? Without the connotations of romantic love, passion

has declined. When passion is so unimportant, it is less possible to reach out to another person. . . . History has amply demonstrated that where there is no passion, there can be no compassion. Another dimension in the non-response to murder and rape reflects the "delighted eye" that is so important to the success of *Confidential*, *Playboy* and the frug. It seems easy today for many people to derive pleasurable voyeuristic excitation from identification with the aggressor or victim of an assault, or with both. [This] interferes with their ability to behave in a socially responsible way. . . .

The passage pretty well epitomizes both the style and the theme of his book.

In current and popular usage the word "sex" has come to connote those impulses and excitements that bring male and female into bodily conjunction; but in the primary and etymological sense (from *secare*, to cut apart or divide) it signifies rather those attributes and attitudes, psychological no less than anatomical, that have distinguished each from the other. These distinctions, the professor assures us, are rapidly disappearing, especially among the generation that