

Wilderness House Literary Review 1/2

Then Comes Marriage

By Molly Lynn Watt

I still feel trapped in time when I remember how I decided to marry Harry. In 1957. Nice girls did not go to a man's apartment. Nice girls did not have sex. And nice girls did not use birth control as that denoted premeditated sex, which was much worse than just having sex to begin with.

I was not a nice girl. But everyone thought I was. I went regularly to Harry's apartment, a painted black basement off Commonwealth Avenue, or on the ground floor, if entering from the alley behind Emanuel Church.

I was not a nice girl. I did have sex, guilty sex, sex with clothes on – his fly unzipped, my skirt clumped up around my waist and my panties pushed down to my knees.

I was not a nice girl. I even used a diaphragm, although it had been difficult to find a doctor who would prescribe one – an illegal act at that time – and it was difficult to insert. My doctor apparently believed that the larger the barrier, the more effective, or maybe he hoped I'd simply grow into it. Whatever the reason, mine always seemed to catch somewhere at the top of my vagina and slide easily out of place dislodging any sense of comfort I might have derived.

I was supposed to be a nice girl. In fact I desired to be a nice girl. I thought sex was nice, and that is what set up the confusion. We didn't talk about sex in 1957. Harry and I did not discuss it. I did not confide in my college roommate. And my mother was still waiting for the best time to talk with me about the onset of menstruation cycles.

I did what a nice girl was expected to do. I decided I should get married, in fact, must get married as I was now a kind of damaged goods girl.

It was okay that he had no money, we liked reading John Dos Passos's USA from the library for courtship.

It was okay that he did not wash his underwear, because he simply went out regularly and purchased new sets. And Harry could play the guitar well.

It was okay that he owned only one charcoal gray suit for winter, one seersucker suit for summer, and two pairs of khakis for everyday because I owned just about the same number of garments. Plus he got free tickets and records due to his position as a copy boy and assistant music critic at the

Christian Science Monitor.

I simply needed one thing from him to test his valor, his virtuousness, his intention to do the right thing by me. I needed him to stop smoking. Harry thought this a humorous requirement – it seemed like everyone smoked in 1957. I was adamant. And so he quit, substituting taking aspirin and drinking coffee – also illegal to Christian Science Monitor employees, but less obvious than smoking.

That December I agreed to marry Harry the following June.

We purchased an engagement ring – a solitary pearl on a flat band of gold. We informed our parents – to my father's consternation – Harry was supposed to ask my father for me, which seemed a little pointless, if you know what I mean. The whirlwind of my family's planning for our wedding started immediately – engagement announcements sent to the papers, bridesmaids invited, ushers asked, flowers and music selected, invitations engraved, the dress and veil purchased, an apartment – not in a basement and certainly not painted black – rented. And the reception planned with the Ladies Benevolent Society of my father's church. I was the pastor's daughter, and they heaped all their love and affection for my dad onto my wedding reception and by default on me.

Harry started to smoke again. And I started to stew, furious at the pace of events. At Harry's betrayal of my test and his bottom-line promise to me. I was too embarrassed to abort the whole wedding thing. Too voiceless to raise my doubts. Too polite to interrupt and take control. I continued playing my role in the charade knowing my heart was empty as passion had flown.

No one ever even whispered, "want to change your mind?"

Harry's first task as my husband on that rainy day in June was to wipe away the tears streaking down my cheeks so the photographer could catch this moment of happily ever after for eternity.

People said I was moved by the enormity of the promises we'd made, but I knew I was moved by the enormity of my mistake.

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