

THE LOST GIRL

In The Lost Girl, Lawrence deals with a girl's search for fulfillment through love, and he shows that in this quest she has to reject the conventional frame of life, and cut herself off from its social and religious guide ropes, and thus become a conventionally "lost girl." Alvina Houghton, "the lost girl," stands for those who are willing to give up all the extraneous factors of life - birth, wealth, and culture for their individual satisfaction.

When Alvina, a daughter of a middle-class proprietor of Manchester House, begins her search for a living relationship with a man, she, no longer a girl, is twenty-eight. Discontented with her conventional unfulfilled life, devoted to housekeeping and to her father's drapery business, she feels that in order to fulfil her "self" she must reject this mechanical bourgeois existence, which degenerates her life:

For day followed day, month followed month, season after season went by, and she grubbed away like a housemaid in Manchester House; she hurried round doing the shopping, she sang in the choir on Sundays, she attended the various chapel events, she went out to visit friends, and laughed and talked and played games. But all the time, what was there actually in her life? Not much. She was withering towards old-maiddom...229

Her "terrible and deadly panic, which overcomes so many unmarried women about the age of thirty,"²³⁰ is increased by

the death of her governess, Miss Frost, whose love of independence is so intense that she remains unmarried until her death. Before she dies Miss Frost cries hysterically for the loss of love, and Alvina seems to hear in the older woman's sobs the anguish of an old maid, the anguish "realised in all its pain after the age of fifty-the loss in never having been able to relax, to submit."²³¹ Determined that she must not be like Miss Frost, Alvina tries to find salvation in her relationship with men. After her affairs with Mr. May, the manager of her father's cinema-cum-theatre, and Albert Whitman, an Oxford intellectual graduate, she finds her real mate, Cicio, an illiterate Italian strolling player, one of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras people-an acting group consisting of Madame Rochard and four young men, who perform Red Indian ballets. Cicio is not a noble savage; like the other performers he is commonplace and not particularly intelligent, certainly not noble, especially in his manner. Madame Rochard tells her that he is the bad boy of the company, and sometimes she fears he has no heart. But Alvina feels that he is really good: "She felt convinced of his ultimate good-nature. He seemed to her to be the only passionately good-natured man she had ever seen. She watched him vaguely, with a strange vague trust, implicit belief in him. In him - in what?"²³²

The rest of the novel is an attempt to answer this question, and a vindication of Alvina's courage and faith in her own intuition. When he kisses her for the first time, on the day of her father's death, it is like "coals of fire on her head."²³³ But after a rather embarrassing "wedding" according to the rites

of Kishwe'gin, in a theatrical boarding-house, he "took her and simply assassinated her",²³⁴ and she "knew that he intended her to be his slave."²³⁵ Yet Alvina still retains her faith in his "passionate good-nature"; and does not listen to any advice of her friends. Cicio came from a village in the Abruzzi, Madame Rochard tells her, and has known extreme poverty as a labourer and boatman in Naples; and, Madame Rochard points out, how can she be sure that he is not merely hoping to rise in the world by attaching himself to her? Alvina, strong-minded, pays no attention to this remark. She admits that Cicio has a shallow and vulgar side, but he has also an "old beauty, formed through civilization after civilization"²³⁶ which make him at bottom indifferent to poverty and wealth. "Only his little modern education made money and independence an idée fixe. Old instincts told him the world was nothing"²³⁷ She trusts him, although he is such a stranger to her, and she submits to him even when he takes her against her will.

Determined to make her own life and to go her own way, Alvina follows him from her home in a Nottinghamshire mining village to Cicio's home in the Abruzzi: "You're a lost girl!" cried Miss Pinnegar. "I like being lost," said Alvina."²³⁸ All her friends think that it is not love that makes her marry lower than herself, but it is her romantic infatuation. Alvina's love for Cicio is not, of course, a romantic love, for she knows that he is not a charming prince, and that he has both faults and goodness. She marries him because she knows instinctively that he is her mate, who can fulfil her life.²³⁹ Her reaction to Cicio is seen clearly when she and

Cicco are at the Italian consulate where they get married:

She turned to him. He sat with the pen perched flourishingly at the end of his fingers, suspended in the serious and artistic business of filling in a form. And his face had a dark luminousness, like a dark transparency which was shut and has now expanded. She quivered, as if it was more than she could fear. For his face was open like a flower right to the depths of his soul, a dark, lovely translucency, vulnerable to the deep quick of his soul. The lovely, rich darkness of his southern nature, so different from her own, exposing itself now in its passionate vulnerability, made her go white with a kind of fear. For an instant, her face seemed drawn and old as she looked down at him, answering his question. Then her eyes became sightless with tears, she stooped as if to look at his writing...240

Her reaction to him is a kind of attraction-repulsion. On the one hand she feels that to follow a man about whom she knows very little to an unknown life in a country about which she knows nothing at all means the risk of her life, and this feeling makes her shrink from him; but on the other hand she feels that in spite of their very differences he is a really good man, and, above all, he is her mate.

After the emotion of seeing the last of war-time England, "like a long ash-grey coffin, slowly submerging"²⁴¹ "it seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cements"²⁴² and the excitement of travel across the continent. Alvina soon realizes that life in the mountain hamlet of

Califano is impossible. This is a country for old men, every one tells her; all the young people try to get away. There, she notices, the peasants are rancorous and dangerous: "When she thought of the inside of the native people she shuddered with repulsion, as in the great, degraded church of Casa Latina. They were horrible."²⁴³ She feels that she must go away, if only to Rome, where at least there will be English people, or back to England, or to America. But the bond between her and Cicio is unbreakable. She finds that under his faults lie his superior warmth, industry, and simple love of life. She loves him, she is his woman, and despite all the hardship that is better than being an old maid-back in Nottinghamshire where she found neither joy nor fulfillment. Through her relation with Cicio she achieve physical fulfillment, and that is enough for her. Fulfillment in both spirit and body is the most important thing in life; however, it is better to be fulfilled physically than never to be fulfilled at all. Thus when Cicio, who is going to be a soldier, urges her to go away and not wait for him, she tells him what she will stay there, and she tries to convince Cicio that the war can separate them from each other just for a while: "If you make up your mind to come back," she encourages him, "you will come back. We have our fate in our hands."²⁴⁴ He will come back to her, Cicio says, and "Be damned to them all."²⁴⁵

Alvina, who has married Cicio, an illiterate Italian peasant, and who is now living in the barren district among foreigners, may be called "the lost girl" as her friends call her; but for Lawrence "she is not morally lost," because she

has found her salvation through Cicio's love, and her search for fulfillment of her "self", Lawrence insisted, is an essentially moral act, even if it makes her reject all society.²⁴⁶

The relation between Cicio and Alvina is another example of a familiar Laurentian doctrine that love must pay no heed to mere conventions or class consciousness. Their marriage is quite satisfactory, because both of them are fulfilled with each other. Between them there is no problem of dominance, since Alvina willingly submits to Cicio.²⁴⁷ Submission usually ends all the conflicts between Laurentian men and women. The satisfactory relation of Cicio and Alvina is contrasted with the relation between Aaron Sisson and his wife in the next novel, Aaron's Rod, in which man-woman relationship is seen in terms of a fight by the woman to possess the man, and of the man's furious struggle to escape.