

Let's do lunch: pasta and a shag

Lunch
Karen Moline
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Lunch is a love/horror story that begins at lunchtime in London restaurant when Nick Muncie first encounters Olivia Morgan. Nick is the archetypal sex symbol, a famous and oh-so-desirable bad boy actor with a past, while Olivia's distinguishing characteristic is not beauty, fame or charisma, but a complete disinterest in our hero. Bored with the proliferation of peroxidized body beautifuls that is the natural accompaniment to his fame, Nick decides to test his sexual prowess on this rare specimen of uncoiffed, unripped and untucked woman.

Despite her initial indifference, Olivia soon develops an uneasy fascination for this man which is fuelled by her knowledge that she is dangerously unaware of how to play the relationship game Hollywood style, where love, lust and ego are too often conflated. Nick's interest confuses, flatters, alarms and intrigues her, and she is unable to sustain the aloof civility he found so alluring. Despite her better judgement, she soon succumbs to his obsession and is drawn

into the destructive battle of wills and desires which forms the basis of this novel.

The novel is narrated not, as might be expected, by either Olivia or Nick, but by Nick's physically repulsive bodyguard M. From his privileged perspective on Nick's life, M sees the perverse and cruel side of Nick, one that is hidden from all others. Despite his awareness of Nick's abhorrent nature, and his complicity in many of Nick's sadistic acts, M is essentially a humane character. His deformity constrains his relations with other people, who are unable to see beyond the grotesque and intimidating demeanour of this modern Frankenstein. His relationship with Nick therefore constitutes his only avenue of human interaction, and this means that his bond with Nick does not permit him to question or judge Nick's actions. Olivia differs from the rest of society, however, as she appreciates that M is more than Nick's obedient slave. This perception endears her to M, who is torn between a previously unchallenged devotion to Nick, a desire to protect Olivia from Nick's destructive urges and his own sexual attraction to her, which entices him to participate in Nick's debauched plans. This conflict of desires, along with M's obvious intelligence and the perspicacious observations of others that his position outside society enables him to

make combine to form a truly original narrative perspective.

The sexual element of the relationship between Nick and Olivia is graphically portrayed. Olivia is both repulsed and excited by their violent sex, which is so unlike the pleasurable but mundane intercourse she has with her nice, suitable boyfriend. For Nick, the constant struggle between the sexual domination he can so easily exert and the emotional submission he unwillingly feels constitute an untenable situation which he needs somehow to resolve. The resolution on which he embarks sets in motion a destructive chain of events with devastating consequences.

Lunch is compelling and easily read, and is set apart from other sexual fiction by its unique narrative perspective. It would be easy to interpret this novel as a mere foray into the glamorous and superficial world of Jackie Collins Hollywood, where people are cruel simply because they can be, but a more significant interpretation is possible. The novel is essentially a study of obsession, and of the effects of fame and adulation on a person's psyche. Although *Lunch* does not offer any ground-breaking insights into human behaviour, the observations which motivated it are skilfully incorporated into a work which is both entertaining and intelligent.

Cathy Abel

KAREN MOLINE



The kind and lovely people at Picador have given us three copies of *Lunch* to give away. Write us a poem which includes lunch and sex and you could win one. It won't necessarily be judged on literary quality so make us laugh. Entries due Friday.