

FROM THE THERAPIST'S CUSHION

by Hans Lobstein

The Splendid Richness of Being Wanted

Day before yesterday some cat shat on my alissi and today it is crawling with wood lice. So they don't just live on wood or dead plants, I thought.

Nicola cried into the telephone:

"My husband wants to come back, what shall I do?

He says we have no money for him to stay away

but I don't want him back, I have no feelings

He wants me to pretend I love him

He says: "I love you!"

Why is it I cannot say to him: "I love you?"

I feel I am being attacked 'I love you': I am in the wrong,

He gives me presents, I feel manipulated,

He is so kind, he is so angry, so hurt,

I am hurt, I am lost and angry and hurt

We are mutually dependent on each other

I must be careful

I don't know how to negotiate,

He will not listen

He shouts at me

He shouts at the children

He tells them he has to sleep in the car, I make him, he says, I push him away

That is what he tells the children

I couldn't help it getting pregnant, so many pressures, and now I am stuck!

He tells me we have no money

He tells me I have ruined him and destroyed him.

He is coming tonight to talk it over,

but he won't listen to anything I say, what can I do?"

At that moment Tim walks in the door and I beckon to him with my finger on my lips, sit down and listen, I shan't be a minute.

And I say into the telephone:

"Write it down, write this:

'One: it was you who walked out to live with another woman

Two: it was you who has had an affair for two years

Three: it is you who now begs me to have you back

Four: and I said yes, and you came

Five: Now you complain I won't sleep with you, enjoy you

Six: but I cannot and I will not command my feelings

Seven: I am as I am

Eight: You can live here but do not expect me to love you

at least not for a while, I need to adjust

get used to what is happening,

I am not going to be destroyed by you

You are welcome to live here, it is your home as well,

but I cannot compel and distort my feelings:

Is that good enough for you?"

"And he says 'no, no, no, it is not good enough, it is all the fault of your counselling courses, all these people who spoil you for me!"

And I say to her: "He acts like a little boy who can't have the toys he wants

The toys he spoilt and now wants back sparkling new unblemished unmarked".

And we say goodbye and I hang up.

And I am glad Tim sits here having heard it all, my cheap wisdom, my advice, all these people who want my help, he hears I am an important person, just as he is, his dad is somebody. Hurrah!

The agony of this world contorted and compressed into one small boast.

LATER

Back from lunch. Real luxury and beauty. On the terrace in Brighton Square overlooking the world and having the most delicious barbecued sharkfish steak and self-help salad from the salad bar. And a fruit salad the seafront at Rethymnon would be proud of. And all for less than £11. Even Concord couldn't do better. I love treating myself to something special. On the table opposite was a nice looking Australian woman reading about Sussex and we had a chat meeting surreptitiously at the salad bar. But that is all, fantasy better than reality.

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Last night Nicola rang again, "how are you, this is Nicky". Long pause.

"What's the matter", I asked.

"How do you know there is anything the matter?"

"Your long pause, sighs and snuffles, I can hear".

"Oh, am I giving it away. I was near tears all day yesterday."

"I had no idea, whatever happened?"

"I was hurt. Vincent hurt me in the morning and I cried floods. I shall become even more frigid, I really will. He hates me. I never knew that he hated me so much. And he tells me he loves me. Why do men hate women?" "We all hate each other. Would you prefer him to be indifferent? He is jealous."

(long pause)

"I did not know he felt like that all through yesterday's session. Very strange, how little I know."

"I am sorry. This is what can happen when we start playing about, massage, groups, sex, lust and all that. Anything can come up to the surface."

"Do you know Tolkien?"

"Years ago."

"Yes, there is a pool there, the Pool of Galadriel. When it is calm you can see everything reflected in it. Like us. We can know everything. Only I wish we could be as calm and as bland."

"But what about the ripples just below the surface? What about your passion? Where does your passion go, your lifeblood, where does it show?"

"There are no ripples. That's what I mean, just calmness. If there were ripples of course you could not see anything, only bits and pieces."

"You sound like someone who wants to be someone else: if only, if only! If only there were no ripples. If only I were calm and beautiful. If only my parents, if only Vincent ..."

"We are playing around and it suddenly becomes serious".

"We know we are playing and we can stop. Or we can enjoy it."

"Do you think we should go on with the massage sessions?"

"I am worried about you and Vincent."

"I will look after him. I will try and get closer to him and see what the hatred is about. I have never seen it before and I am upset. He wanted to murder me. That is what it felt like. I am not using the word likely. I will try and resolve this."

He wants me to massage his neck every day until we meet again on Friday. Do you think I should?"

"No, for heavens sake, certainly not. He can't take it, nobody can, except in very small doses. This is much more powerful than you think."

"Yes, it is like a crash course in learning to feel, and what to do with your feelings, how to process them, and he never could let himself feel very much."

"Well, then, please go slowly."

"All right, I will cope till Friday. But I wonder why I am so unwilling to do anything about it? Why I am so unwilling to help him?"

"How about letting him help you?"

"That even more."

"Do you think we should stop this altogether? It is difficult between people who have strong ties. I don't know what may come up and we may all hate each other before long."

"No, don't stop. Let's take it easy and not get so worried. We'll manage somehow. Let's stick together and help each other even through hatred and hurt."

"You are asking a lot."

"Yes, I am asking a lot. Too much? Vincent has just been telling me off for one and a half hours and I am not allowed to say a word to him. It is ridiculous. He doesn't want any changes, he says. "What changes don't you want?" I asked him. "We never agreed that my house here is going to have this upheaval", he says, "so much of you spread around", and so on."

"What is he really saying?" I ask.

"I don't know, one minute he is friendly and says he doesn't want to leave, the next minute he tells me that all these changes are upsetting him".

"So what are you going to do? You are both in some turmoil. What options do you have?"

"If I move out with the children which he says he doesn't want me to do, it will be a great strain on me, it took all I could do to keep us going here and find lodgers, now I shall have to get them out again, and have to have my telephone moved".

"Can you negotiate?"

"He keeps changing his mind, one day he is happy with our plans, the next day he denies he has ever made any."

"He is obviously in conflict, as you are. I have a lot of sympathy for him, he wants you around but he doesn't want the disturbance, and he doesn't know how to have both. And he feels guilty for messing you about, I am sure."

"Yes, well, maybe. He is so argumentative, he wants everything all his way and he overrides anything I say. What can I do, I can either stay on here with him or without him or move out or he moves out. I never know what he will do next. He now says he won't apply for planning permission for me to work here, well, that will make it all quite impossible."

"You have a third option."

"What is that?"

"Draw up a contract, put it in writing, all you have agreed and all you each want and expect. Then he won't be able to deny that he said this or that. You need something solid or else when these people start coming for your counselling training groups next September, he suddenly will say it is too much, he can't stand them all, and he will pull the plug out. Maybe the contract should have a pull-out clause for you both, with financial compensations? Otherwise you will lose a whole year of planning and organising and getting yourself established."

"Yes, I'll draw up a plan and a contract and give it to a solicitor to draw up with such clauses ..."

Well, that was last night, not really poetry, but poetry of reality.. What of today? A power game. Fanned by words like 'I shall miss you'. 'I've got you.' 'I love you!'

The Magic of Brighton - was that love or lust? Or neither or both? Or something else altogether? Please tell me, I need to know. Does it matter to know? Can I just let it be? It was, so it was. Don't push the river. But I LIKE swimming upstream. Without it I feel dead. Am I afraid of death? Now that I ask myself the question, perhaps not. I am afraid of life.

In the film *Moonstruck* this elderly Italian woman in New York wants to know why men have to chase after women. Because God took a rib from a man and left a big hole, and man has been trying to fill it ever since. But why, then, asks the woman, do men have to have more than one woman? Because they fear death.

That's what they said. Because we fear death. But what is this death I fear so much? A nothingness. A going away, leaving the joy behind me, swimming upstream, the unfinished symphony. So what is it I fear, if I fear not death, which, the more I think about it, the less convinced I am. Is it that I fear other people dying, being left behind, being left alone, do I fear death by projection? Very likely. Specially as I do not mind at all being left alone. I fear not death, but life. We have this idea that we are without much value. We are directed towards 'doing' and devalue 'being'. If the inner drive of a man's sexuality is procreative (doing), rather than his or their mutual sensuality (being), and the survival of the species depends on it, man will look for child-bearing women, much younger women, women just out of puberty. Or is that special pleading, do you think? I can easily feel guilty about it.