



Lovesickness

Patricia Welles

Ms A, a sophisticated, attractive older woman, meets unsophisticated, intelligent older Mr Z in a professional capacity. He is her 'teacher', she one of many

students in his class. The first day she arrives for the class early and since no one is yet there she waits in a semi-dark ante-room. Eventually Mr Z arrives and is taken

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by surprise by her. He immediately smiles and opens his arms to her in an expansive, warm and welcoming gesture. It is this gesture which for her becomes the symbol of him when later she has fallen obsessively in love with him.

In the beginning she is not aware of any deep feeling for him, although she likes his personality and admires his knowledge of the subject he teaches. A few months later she becomes increasingly sexually attracted to him. She begins to notice everything about him: his eyes like the colour of the sea at twilight, the loving and gentle qualities of his voice, the way he pronounces words, or mispronounces them, the way he walks into the room and 'performs' for the students for a while, then settles into a serious and also light-hearted discussion of the material. She scrutinises him. He likes to be liked. He is respectful to everyone. He listens well. His easy-going nature and his relaxed, eternal youthfulness compel her. She experiences intense romantic feelings about him. She begins to think constantly about him, wondering what his 'other life' is like. Is he married? Does he have a family? She has only known gay men to be sensitive in the way he seems to be. Perhaps he is gay?

His possible sexual preference is put to one side but held on to as an open question whose answer could disturb her. This does not interfere with her fantasising about him. She imagines they are alone together. She has him to herself. She already knows he is open to speaking about the most intimate matters. She believes that there is nothing he could not understand about her. She would be able to reveal her most hidden secrets. She thinks about everything they will do and be together.

Her passion for him develops and she is

aware that accompanying her feelings of excitement is a feeling of pain and dread. She cannot sleep properly and loses interest in eating. Slowly, a terrifying feeling of panic is emerging which she cannot get rid of. She feels uncomfortable with the other students, especially the younger women. Ms. A is the same generation as Mr. Z and although she thinks they would have life experience and mutual interests which they could share, there is the threat (if he is not gay) that he would probably prefer someone younger, or different from herself and, of course, he may already have a partner. She begins to doubt that he could care about her and dwells on all her 'imperfections' and the various reasons why he would reject her.

The jealousy begins to dominate her thoughts, and her panic increases. The lovesickness creeps into every phase of her life as if she has already psychically lived through their love affair, and the end of it where she will lose him. Although outwardly she is functioning normally she feels self-destruction looming and thinks of suicide — the ways in which she can escape her frightening, overwhelming feelings. She tries to get a grip on this and becomes aware that she is causing the pain. She is her pain.

Six months have passed. The pain remains. The class is still in session, so that she sees him each week. She decides she must see a therapist before she goes mad. She asks Mr Z for the name of a therapist and he tells her that he would wish to discuss this with her to find out what it's about so that he can send her to the right person. He is also a therapist. She then rings him and he tells her he does not know a therapist at the moment.

In the telephone call she tries to find out

if he has a relationship and she fails to get the information she seeks. She flirts with him in an oblique way and cannot decide if he responds to this or whether he is just being charming, as he would be with anyone else. She is completely uncertain as to whether he could be interested in her as a woman. She knows he enjoys her ideas, her writing, her contribution to his class, and he has already rewarded her appropriately. He behaves in an exemplary fashion in terms of the 'real' relationship. In the course of the telephone call he asks her, 'What do you want from me?' and also, 'I'll take the lead from you as to what you want'. His comments are impersonal (or are they?), just what a therapist who understands boundaries would say. She suggests that they meet at the weekend to discuss 'therapy' and he says, 'No, I need the weekend for myself'. He has not said, 'I need the weekend for myself and my partner'. *There is a flicker of hope. This is quickly dashed, however, as she retires to her inner depressed conviction that in any case he is certain to reject her. It is then agreed that they might meet when the class ends and that perhaps he could 'help' her as a therapist, or they could just have coffee together and chat. Everything is left with a question mark.*

She cannot stop thinking about him. She is up all night in anguish. Her pain is intense. She experiences only him, having obliterated all other thoughts, as if obsessing over him is him. The obsession is a way to have him. In desperation she finds a therapist to discuss her panic, and the feelings of jealousy and rejection which have

taken over her life. The therapist understands and confirms to her what she already has gleaned. Mr Z is a 'figure of fantasy'.

Ms A does not return to the therapist, as she wants to take the tiger by the tail herself. She can now relate Mr Z to her childhood, to her relationship with her mother whom she shared with a sister; her relationship to her father, who was affectionate, possessive and critical (like Ms A herself), and with the sister whom she loved/hated and who died young, leaving Ms A to spend the rest of her life coming to terms with the loss. Ms A arrives at some insight into her feelings over Mr Z. The panic subsides. Her feelings of jealousy have been submerged, perhaps despatched back to the unconscious from which they sprang. She has recognised the 'Oedipal' or projective elements of her love for him and she clearly understands that in her feelings she has lived the imaginary drama. She feels relieved of a heavy weight.

Yet Mr Z's continues to be the last image she sees before she falls asleep at night and the first one when she wakes. Although she recognises that it is her unconscious inner constellations that have caused her lovesickness, her feelings for him do not leave her alone. No matter how hard she tries she cannot stop herself loving him. The obsession stubbornly remains. He has no inkling of the profound feelings he has engendered in her. But are these real feelings? And why is Ms A unable to work through them? What is really happening here?