

As kids we learn the simplicity of love. We love our parents, grandparents, siblings and other relatives. It's not until our teenage years we start to grasp what real romantic love is, or isn't. Throughout the compelling novel *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell, she gives us an insight on the negative side effects of love.

For Vanessa the love she had for her teacher who was 17+ years to her senior had a lot of negative effects on her life. One example of this is the struggle to maintain healthy relationships. Vanessa had a long line of love attempts but one guy stuck around longer than the others. "After a year, he tried to turn it into an ultimatum, either I go to therapy, or we break up. Not even that moved me; he was the one who caved." (Russell 50). Vanessa's then Boyfriend Ira cared about her so much and wanted it to make it work that he was willing to look past her keeping in contact with her abuser as long as she started to see a therapist, but being that Vanessa saw the abuse as love instead of what it actually was, it eventually caused her to push away someone who wanted to see her get better and the help she deserved. Another example of this is Vanessa's relationship with her mother. Vanessa and her mother weren't the closest but she still talked with her mom whenever things went wrong.

Due to the fact that Vanessa is in love with her teacher she's overlooked a lot of questionable things. One of the most disturbing things was when she was having one of her late night phone conversations with her teacher Strane. "When he moves away from remembering me and begins to talk about the girls in his practice, I follow him. He describes the pale underbellies of their arms when they raise their hands, the tendrils that escape their ponytails, the flesh that travels down their necks when he tells them they're precious and rare. He says it's unbearable the way they drip with beauty. He tells me he calls them up to his desk, his hand on their knees. "I pretend they're you," he says, and my mouth waters as though a bell's been rung, signaling a long-buried craving. I roll onto my stomach, shove a pillow between my legs. Keep going, don't stop."

(Russell 358). The teacher has just confessed to molesting other girls but all Vanessa chooses to hear is that he still thinks of her, this ropes her back in because for her the love never stopped, he's still the only one she's been intimate with even 7 years after their affair. She's been in their shoes so she knows that the pat on the knee eventually become them having sex but she doesn't care, all she cares about is how much she still wants him and how he still thinks about the things they did when she was younger.

Navigating through your teenage years is already complicated but when you add being in love with your teacher things become way more complicated. Vanessa had seen a recruitment video of Browick High School during eighth grade year of middle school and convinced her parents to send her to private school where she'd met her abuser. "I started the process of converting my parents to let me apply, I made a twenty-point list entitled "Reasons Why Browick Is A Better Place Than Public School." (Russell 11) Vanessa thought a lot about going to this school so much that she made a list on why this school was better for her. When word got out about her affair to her high school teacher she took the blame saying she lied because she had a crush on him instead of telling him the truth in order to keep him from going to prison, which resulted into her getting kicked out of school. She put her education on the line and her reputation all because she loved this man and thought he loved her too.

Love is never easy, probably never will be, there will always be ups, down and differences but some people find a way to make it work. For Kate Russell's character Vanessa Wye this wasn't the case. Her love for her abuser destroyed potentially better and healthier relationships in her life, her judgement and moral code. Vanessa's love for made her a difficult person to be around because she couldn't see her abusers "love" for what it really was.