

# Anastasia's Story



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Helen Mia Harris is a registered therapist but offers her insights and advice for guidance only. All dates, place names, titles and events in this account are factual. However, the names have been changed in order to protect privacy and respect patient confidentiality.

# Anastasia's Story

## Is It Passionate Attraction? Or Is It Loving Too Much?



**Roughly 3 years ago a lady by the name of Anastasia came to see me.**

She was a very attractive woman in her mid-thirties who worked in real estate. And she played acoustic guitar, wrote her own songs and sang in wine bars at the weekend.

I met Anastasia when she came to me for advice on how to overcome her feelings of insecurity and “neediness” in her relationships.

### **Here's Anastasia's story in her own words...**

*“I met Ben after two years of living alone as I was fearful of getting close to anyone. It's as if I feel overcome by this weakness inside and it scares me. With this new relationship, I feel this intense love for him and I'm scared of my own feelings.*

*I know that if I don't get help, I will repeat the same patterns as I did in my previous relationships. All I know is that this 'thing' happens to me and, before I know it, I am taken over by it. It feels like an intense passion but it actually hurts. If he is far away from me; distant; there but not there – especially when we are together – it is unbearable.*

*I want so much to reach him but he pulls away. The more he moves away, the further in I go, until in the end he walks out on me. There's so much more but it's hard to describe in words."*

As Anastasia sits in the chair I notice that she is playing with the buttons on her cardigan, nervously pulling her rings on and off; her head bowed down throughout the session as if she exists in her own internal space.

She then seems to come out of this space and tells me that Ben does a lot of **photography** as a part-time hobby. She tells me that he enjoys taking photos of Anastasia, and she makes a point of telling me that they are taken in black and white sepia and that that he "captures" something in her.



**I ask what it is he captures and she goes on to describe this feeling in detail...**

*"It's as though he is "there" – really with me – I feel vulnerable and shy, in a way exposed. But it's a good feeling, as if he sees straight in to me, and I feel at home with him. Alive. I don't want those moments to end. So when they do, I feel dropped. Alone. And then he just changes, and we are far away from one another again."*

**Anastasia becomes agitated, and I can literally feel her grief as if something at that point after the photography sessions is lost – and she no longer exists.**

We should note that her reaction to Ben's absence was *not* depression or sadness in which she pined or yearned for him. Instead it was panic, because of the dissolution of something in her, which owed its existence to the presence of Ben and his continued attention.

## **She was a flower that withered in the absence of one day's rain...**



If Anastasia were in the company of someone who really knew her, the panic would subside. In this case it was only Ben that could “save” her from this debilitating fear and the panic of being alone.

### **So what brought about these feelings? This fear? This panic?**

The pivotal point around which all her life is centered is her lack of ontological autonomy. It was my view that the lack of a secure base and “mirroring” in early childhood was a consequence of her mother's absence and an inability to nurture Anastasia because of her own depressive illness, which I will talk more about in just a moment...

This creates a precarious sense of self and a “fading away” of Anastasia's own existence if she isn't able to succeed in evoking the presence of someone who “sees” her or replace the mirroring phase that was so lost in her primary years.

**Next, I asked Anastasia how they had first met and for how long she had been with Ben.**

She tells me they had met 10 months earlier when Anastasia was singer in the bar.

She had noticed him in the audience and described it as an immediate thunderbolt through her body. So much so in fact, that she felt deeply selfconscious on stage which is something that no singer wants to feel in a live performance.

She explains; *“I couldn't perform as I felt as though he was looking through me, exactly like I felt later when he looked through the camera lens at me.”*

Anastasia believed that she and Ben were destined to meet, and so, after the performance, it came as no surprise to Anastasia that he approached her.

**However, what happened then wasn't quite what she had expected.**

After speaking with her for an hour or so, Ben asked for Anastasia's phone number, and said that he'd call her and arrange dinner one evening.

Anastasia was excited and explained to me that it felt like love at first sight.

She was already deciding what she would wear, where they could eat, and started busily planning for a long future together.

**Every day she rushed home from work to see if he had called on her landline.**

Throughout each day, she kept her cell phone close by her, fearful that she'd miss his calls – but six days passed and she still hadn't heard from him.

Day by day she grew more despondent and agitated, and began panicking, crying and becoming increasingly low.

Within one week of meeting Ben for no longer than an hour, Anastasia had stopped eating, was unable to write songs and even cancelled her booking in the Wine Bar for fear of seeing Ben.

Anastasia had resigned herself to the fact that he wouldn't be calling, and in her own words, she realised that she needed to “pull herself together.”

By now even her day job was being affected by this feeling of **rejection and heartbreak**.

## Then, on the ninth day, and completely out of the blue, Ben called...



Anastasia found she was unable to speak, partly through shock!

Ben invited her out, and she happily accepted. The pair of them went on a dinner date and when he dropped her home later that evening, they kissed in the car.

Anastasia explained to me that he seemed responsive when he kissed her, and that it was incredibly intense and passionate.

She said that she loved his natural body scent and it all felt very familiar and close. Anastasia asked him whether he'd like to come in for a drink, but Ben declined saying that he would like to take things slowly.

Anastasia found it hard to leave his car, **terrified that they'd never see each other again**, so caught hold of Ben's hand and asked when they could meet.

Ben replied that he would be in touch soon and Anastasia reluctantly got out of his car.

It was at this moment that Anastasia felt the most **intense sense of fear come over her**. She was fraught with anxiety at the thought that Ben might be rejecting her, and she wondered how something that felt so right, could potentially just disappear.

In Anastasia's world, if Ben really felt as much as she did, he would want to spend the night with her, or see her the next day.

This was the beginning of a sad and very complex problem for Anastasia as it only took one phrase from Ben; '**that he would be in touch soon**', to create an avalanche of raw emotion and abandonment.

This literally brought her close to a breakdown, with prolonged hours of panic, anxiety and heartbreak, after only one 'date'.

**That's often all it takes for anyone who suffers from this kind of affliction of the heart.**

## **This is love addiction in its most extreme form...**

**So what happened next?**



A few days later Ben did call Anastasia, who masks her brokenness at all costs, scared that Ben will find out who she “really” is and how weak she’s become.

This story of how Anastasia and Ben meet, paves the way for the rest of their relationship. They go onto meet several times

after this, which this leads to Anastasia beginning to stay over at Ben’s house most nights of the week over a period of 10 months.

**But what happened next was a progression of disturbing events and symptoms that finish with a shattered and “lost” Anastasia.**

Here we look at what Anastasia does to survive and to break the pattern that has been going on since her first infatuations, which started when she was just 13 years old.

**For brevity, the timeline below is outlined in a bullet point format:**

- Anastasia spent most nights at Ben’s house.
- Ben gives Anastasia no sense of a future together but enjoys having her around.
- Anastasia continues her day job but feels anxious if Ben doesn’t call.
- Ben suggests that Anastasia spends more time writing songs rather than performing (Ben didn’t like the amount of male interest that she was getting when performing).
- Communication begins to break down (they speak to each other less and less and seem to occupy two different worlds) which leads Anastasia to feel acute abandonment and anxiety.
- Ben is only present when he and Anastasia do photographic sessions together, ironically, close-up facial shots followed by intense sexual excitement ending with Ben shutting down and Anastasia broken-hearted.



- Eventually Anastasia asks Ben where their relationship is going and whether or not he loves her. Ben replies that it's all happened too fast and that maybe they need some space.
- This is the point when Anastasia comes into therapy as she knows she must let go, but has no idea how to live without him.
- Anastasia is inconsolable and explains that it feels like part of her body has been amputated. She feels totally powerless and states in her own words, *"I am worm-like with Ben, nothing but a weak worm begging him to have me back."* She is losing all sense of her own self-worth and independence and plays power games to make him jealous. The more she pursues Ben, the more Ben withdraws, until finally, she has to move back to her own home which feels utterly barren, desolate and empty.
- After a few months of living alone in her flat whilst undergoing treatment, Anastasia becomes more independent. Ben finds this attractive and begins to pursue her once again. At this point Anastasia declines as she feels she now has to heal herself before she gets involved with anyone again.

**During our sessions we concentrated on Anastasia's primary care givers as a child.**

**It came as no surprise to me that Anastasia was an only child.**

Her father was emotionally absent, stoic, introverted and withdrawn. Anastasia explains that he does have emotions, but finds it incredibly difficult to show them.

Her mother was over-protective, strict, controlling and narcissistic. She suffered from an obsession with cleanliness and order. Her mother used to dust and polish incessantly and would bleach the toilet at least ten times a day.

**Anastasia explained to me that as long as the house was clean, that was all that mattered to her mother.**

She says, *"It was as if I wasn't there until I made a mess. She would always tell me no friends were allowed in the house. It's always been like that. And when I did go out, I felt as if she was everywhere, threatening me if I came home with dirty shoes. I felt like I couldn't breathe, with her possessive nature and her screaming at me to wash my hands all the time."*

Anastasia tells me that her mother had Post Natal Depression after Anastasia was born, and also suffered from a nervous disorder. But she loved to sing and always wanted Anastasia to be famous.

Anastasia's mother would tell her that she had a **loveless marriage**; that she had married the wrong kind of man and wished she had left him years ago, but didn't know how.



I looked down at Anastasia's hands again and noticed that her skin was very transparent and thin. There were obvious signs of dermatitis. She'd mentioned that since the age of 12 she'd suffered with respiratory problems and asthma.

### **Anastasia then speaks of a recurring nightmare...**

*"I am swimming around in a tumultuous sea and fear I may drown as I don't have my Ventolin inhaler. However, I notice that the water and the scenery is very pretty when I keep my head above the water. I become scared as the waves are getting larger and larger and I realise that I need to find something to cling onto or I'm going to die. As I start to panic I see a huge stone post in the shape of a triangle sticking out of the sea; one of those posts that they attach boats to, to stop them floating away. I always wake up in a panic and have to use my inhaler to breathe better."*

As I listened to her account of the dream, my associations led me initially to ask myself whether the dream was connected to her feelings of being **"smothered"** or **"drowned"** by her mother's attentions in relation to cleanliness.



John Bowlby (a British psychiatrist in Attachment Theory, pictured left) used the term **"maternal deprivation"** to refer to the separation or loss of the mother as well as the failure to develop an attachment between mother and child.

In addition, the little girl needs to "hear" her father express appreciation and value for her femininity and for the mother's femininity.

Being as Anastasia's father was emotionally unavailable and her mother showed little love nor respect for her father, it seemed clear that she had no secure "base" from an early age.

Understandably, the result of this was that she only “existed” in relation to the partner that she was attracted to, especially throughout the photography sessions she shared with Ben.

Again, it would come as no surprise to me that when Anastasia felt an attraction to someone, they would immediately become the “stone posts” for her to cling to for life, unconsciously recreating the oedipal triangle between mother, father and child.

She could then imagine a solid and secure future that seemed warmer and safer than her primary care givers could ever give her.

Yet the result was always one of great disappointment, as her fusion and merging with her partners played a key role in Anastasia’s experience in the love relationship, leading to a low sense of self-worth, a loss of self-regulation, individuality and self-value.

**I also worked with Anastasia on her past, particularly the period between 13-18 years of age.**

Anastasia explained to me that from a young age she’d had crushes on boys; sometimes ones her own age, and at other times, boys a few years older.



**She would follow them after school and hide in bushes, fearful that they’d see her.**

When she found out that a particular boy wasn’t interested in her, or already had a girlfriend, she would become nervous and physically ill, and would subsequently take many days off school which would lead to problems with her education as well the development of chronic self-esteem issues.

Anastasia and I successfully worked on restoring her sense of self-worth and her ability to self-care. This was done in order for her to be able to share in lasting, supportive relationships in the future, *without* losing her individuality and her own self-respect.

## Our work included...

- ✓ Working through issues regarding her father's absence and unavailability
- ✓ Projection: How all the boys/men she had a crush on were ways to recreate what Anastasia wanted from her father in early childhood
- ✓ Separation anxiety and a longing for a secure base with a maternal mother
  - ✓ Working through insecure attachment in her relationships
- ✓ Fixations and obsessive behaviour and the compulsion to merge in a relationship
- ✓ Facing the overwhelming effects of abandonment
- ✓ Addressing the longing for love and how to experience a sense of self love
- ✓ Working through panic, anxiety and fear of separation
- ✓ Self-development exercises to gain strength, self-worth and lovability
- ✓ Re-directing the craving for love to significant new connections with the self
- ✓ Building healthy levels of self-esteem
- ✓ Loving someone free of demand and expectation
- ✓ Recognising connection and closeness
- ✓ The difference between healthy love, insecure love and fantasy
- ✓ Knowing that when love hurts, you need to let go
- ✓ Self-empowerment and self-validation
- ✓ Surviving a painful separation and heartbreak that can occur through loss
- ✓ Understanding what it is to love too much, and finding a way through love addiction
- ✓ Reversing self-abandonment (a core feature of love addiction)
- ✓ Discovering a way through rejection and insecurity
- ✓ Working through past hurts and moving forward
- ✓ Working through shame and blame: parents, primary care givers and past relationships that led to rejection, co-dependency and abandonment
- ✓ Looking at the types of men that Anastasia had been attracted to throughout her life (narcissistic or emotionally unavailable partners which would often trigger abandonment issues and emotional exclusion)

## Here are 4 key elements in Anastasia's therapy...

1. **First we attempted to address how her self-esteem depended on her being a care giver and “rescuer” of her partners.** (Anastasia always felt secure with Ben when she was able to help him out in some way. This allowed her to feel useful in the relationship, reinforcing her desire to be needed and wanted).

2. **It was then important that Anastasia understood that her “love addiction” dated back to her childhood experiences.** (Anastasia kept a journal, a timeline from when she was eight to fifteen years old. This helped her to see how far these repetitive patterns went back in her relationships (when she experienced her first crush on boys or her teachers at school). For Anastasia, this was a very powerful exercise as she used the creative writing process to turn very raw experiences of love, loss and grief into poetry and songs).
3. **We then addressed the issue of why Anastasia felt the need to change who she was in a relationship, and be who *Ben* wanted her to be, rather than remain comfortable in her own self.** (In only 10 months, Anastasia had dyed her naturally dark brown hair BLONDE, as she believed that Ben found blonde women more attractive. She’d also go on fad diets to shed weight and to change her body shape to acquire a more slender look, one that Ben approved of).
4. **Going “cold turkey”.** (There were times when Anastasia longed to call Ben and believed it would be different the next time. So I worked with Anastasia on a “take each day at a time” basis, because love addiction, like drug addiction, means that one small taste can result in a person becoming hooked once more. This is often the hardest part of the program, as love withdrawal and rejection are experienced as the most debilitating symptoms to overcome when working with love addiction and co-dependency).

During our sessions, we worked through some very painful issues that stemmed from Anastasia’s early childhood (the **fear of abandonment** was one of her most primal fears, and understandably so).

**And the pain caused by this was overwhelming for her.**

In the midst of her hurt, it was hard to see an end to her feelings of rejection, shame and weakness, so **mirroring and self-validation** was central to the therapeutic process.

It was important to find a way to move beyond the past; to work through raw emotions and move the trajectory of our sessions into the future, and it was this that filled her with hope and inspiration to return to her music, and to her career.



As a result, I planned a unique Recovery Program for Anastasia to help her work towards a way of loving which would be **free of demand, expectation and disappointment**. One where she could be free to experience love, connection and closeness *without* the devastating effects of hungry love, love addiction or loving too much.

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*“Immature love says I love you because I need you.  
Mature love says I need you because I love you.”*

— **Erich Fromm, Social Psychologist**

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## **HOW MY RECOVERY PROGRAMME HELPED ANASTASIA OVERCOME LOVE ADDICTION & CO-DEPENDENCY – **AND HOW IT CAN HELP YOU TOO!****

Below are some of the key steps I used to help Anastasia reclaim her self-worth and reverse her self-abandonment, together with advice and guidance on how you can do the same.

- ✓ **We looked for signs in the relationship when the distance and disconnection between Anastasia and Ben became more noticeable than the closeness and connection.** What I mean by this is that being able to gauge whether or not the “love equilibrium” is balanced is absolutely crucial. In other words, if you sense that you are more emotionally present than your partner, then follow your instinct and move forward, as this is more often than not the first trigger for love addiction and loving too much. For Anastasia, the first sign would have been the intense emotional reaction she experienced when Ben failed to call her at the very beginning. Remember, if you are immediately thrown into this kind of debilitating anxiety, then the root cause of this feeling needs to be addressed if you want to enjoy a happy, healthy relationship.
- ✓ **We worked on retaining Anastasia’s individuality *without* losing or sacrificing herself for the sake of the relationship.** Anastasia moved in with Ben after only a few weeks, without any mutual plan or conscious

decision on either part. They very rarely spoke to one another about the merits of this plan.

- ✓ **I showed Anastasia how to enjoy a loving relationship as two separate individuals and retain her own unique character.** This is what makes a truly healthy relationship. In contrast, Anastasia quickly began to give up on her own projects, her career, and her music after she met Ben.
- ✓ **I taught Anastasia how to recognise when a relationship turns toxic, and it's time to leave.** Anastasia's relationship with Ben was causing feelings of powerless and worthlessness. When a relationship creates these types of negative feelings in *anyone*, it's time to move on.
- ✓ **We addressed how Anastasia's own self-esteem depended on her being a care giver and "rescuer" of her partner.** Anastasia always felt secure with Ben when she was able to help him out in some way. This allowed her to feel "useful" in the relationship, reinforcing her desire to be needed and wanted.
- ✓ **I showed Anastasia how to use her history to build a better future.** Anastasia constructed a "timeline" in her journal, from her earliest memory of a crush or attraction right the way up to her late teens, which enabled her to see how far back this "intensity" went, and where it might have started. For Anastasia, this was a very powerful exercise as she used the creative writing process to turn very raw experiences of love, loss and grief into poetry and songs.
- ✓ **I showed Anastasia that she should no longer change herself to please her partner. She should be who she is.** In only 10 months, Anastasia had dyed her naturally dark brown hair to blonde as she believed that Ben found blonde women more attractive. She'd also go on fad diets to shed weight and attempt to create the body shape that Ben found more attractive.
- ✓ **I showed Anastasia how important it was to stick to her treatment program – no matter how low she felt.** Remember, this kind of treatment takes time. There were occasions when Anastasia longed to call Ben and believed things would be different next time. So I worked with Anastasia using "the no contact" strategy, as love addiction, like drug addiction, means that one small taste can pull you back in again.

- ✓ **I reminded Anastasia to hold onto the fact that she would be free one day.**

During recovery programs like Anastasia's, it's easy to lose sight of the end goal. Freedom from love addiction and co-dependency isn't a physical feeling you can touch and feel. But it is there. And eventually, you WILL find it.



- ✓ **I showed Anastasia the importance of keeping a journal documenting all the things that made her feel connected and alive.** Doing this helped her to feel self-validated and heightened her sense of self-worth. This was by far the most transformative part of my work with Anastasia and one which reconnected her to her music, her song writing – and ultimately, her real self.
- ✓ **I taught Anastasia that self-care, emotional self-reliance and self-acceptance was the key in overcoming love addiction.** Often this very painful condition will occur in those who are lonely, frustrated and feel as though their life lacks meaning and purpose. It's important to find a project for yourself that you feel passionate about, because remember, personal development and personal growth will be the key to unlocking the door and releasing you from the debilitating symptoms of love withdrawal.
- ✓ **I showed Anastasia how to love “what is” rather than trying to make it what it “should or ought to be”.** Often, people fall in love with the possibility of what a person “could be”. Consequently, they feel deeply disappointed that the other person won't change and reciprocate the level of emotional connection that they experience. Anastasia tried everything in the hope that Ben might eventually change, particularly self-help books about fear of closeness and emotional connection.
- ✓ **I showed Anastasia the importance of surrounding herself with healthy relationships that are based on trust, mutual respect, integrity and honesty, as this would help her to let go of the past and build self-worth.** Feeling unworthy and unlovable is a key part of love addiction, so it's vital that you say goodbye to any toxic relationships. After our sessions together, Anastasia was overcome with how emotionally free and independent she felt. There was no debilitating sense of being rendered powerless when she experienced a passionate attraction towards someone she felt a deep connection with. In her own words; *“I can still feel the intensity and the desire for someone if I like them, yet it's as if I won't let*



*it overcome me like before. I feel calmer. I never ever want to be that needy again. The good thing is I never wait for the phone to ring now. It's really about just letting go, and if someone wants me they will find me, but in the meantime I know I can survive and continue to compose my music and write songs. Actually, if anything my songs are more honest and truthful than ever before."*

- ✓ **Finally, we dealt with a number of painful issues from Anastasia's childhood, because when it comes to dealing with love addiction, it's vital that you're able to find a way to move beyond the past.** Many people blame parents or primary care givers for everything that occurs in their life. However, this keeps your mindset "stuck in the past". At some point, we all have to take responsibility for ourselves and integrate past hurts into present reality, rather than keeping us "locked in time". For Anastasia, it was all about working through raw emotions and moving the trajectory of our sessions into the future, and it was this that filled her with hope and inspiration.



## **Did you relate to Anastasia's story?**

**If so, here are 14 further steps you can take...**

**STEP #1: Be careful not to swap one addiction for another.** Many sufferers will turn to self-medicating, smoking, drugs and alcohol to help them through this painful time.

**STEP #2: Make a significant new connection with yourself.** Build your self-esteem, gain self-worth and shed self-defeating thoughts.

**STEP #3: Try not to dwell on past mistakes or regrets.** Accept that you can't change the past and focus instead on the present and the future.

**STEP #4: Practise "letting go".** Love addiction is often felt as an insatiable hunger. Don't manipulate someone in an attempt to *make* them be with you.

**STEP #5: Do something you are passionate about.** Choose something that gives your life meaning and purpose. Remember, this has happened to you as you

have “projected” all that you are, and all your passion onto the person of addiction.

**STEP #6: Don’t put your life on hold whilst you wait for love to come.** Instead stay focused on your own dreams, goals and aspirations, and set new goals and projects for your own personal growth.

**STEP #7: Discover emotional pain management tools to help you overcome the pain of romantic love withdrawal.** Make sure you complete the guided imagery sessions in your 15-Step Recovery Programme, as this will help you reduce the stress hormones that may be limiting your recovery.

**STEP #8: Hold on to the fact that you *will* be free one day and you can survive love withdrawal.** This won’t last forever. Freedom, happiness and a chance at real, healthy love is just around the corner.

**STEP #9: Stop seeking approval and validation from others.** Remember, it is only YOU who can accomplish this. Self-validation is the only thing that matters.

**STEP #10: Stop “abandoning” *yourself* in relationships.** This way you can finally find autonomy and emotional self-reliance.

**STEP #11: Remember that it’s OK to be alone.** If you’ve been stuck in a destructive relationship cycle, it’s BETTER to be alone for a while. And don’t worry, you *will* survive the pain of romantic love withdrawal.

**STEP #12: Know that you CAN survive without the person of addiction.** Love withdrawal can feel as if a part of your body has been amputated. But believe me, YOU CAN SURVIVE THIS!

**STEP #13: Each day give yourself at least three things to do that will reflect your new-found independence.** Doing this will strengthen your ability to take care of yourself, and build emotional self-reliance.

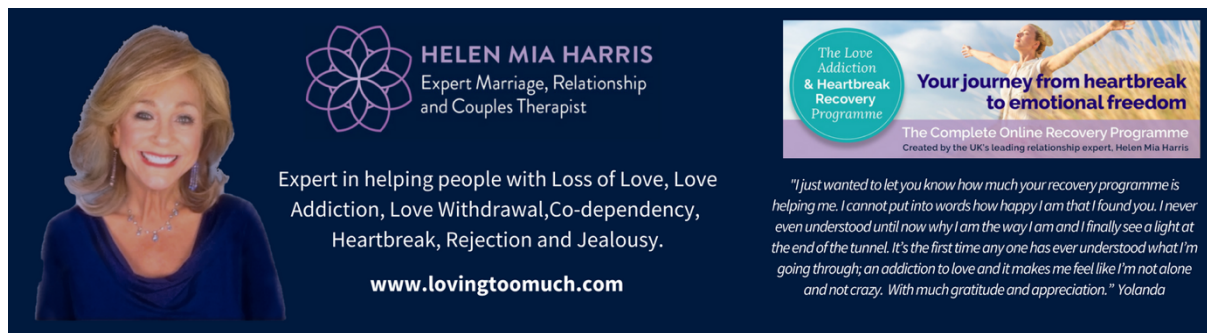
**STEP #14: Make choices that impact the way you live in a POSITIVE way.** Don’t allow yourself to play the role of victim. Instead, make decisions that reflect your strength as a man or woman.

Like Anastasia, once you've applied the principles of my "Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle" Program to your daily life, you will emerge **emotionally free** of the debilitating sense of powerlessness and start to experience a stronger, more vital connection to yourself.

And very soon you'll be free to find **real healthy love**, and true unbridled happiness.

If you're looking for a proven, step-by-step program to help you bypass painful emotions and emerge emotionally free and self-empowered, then take a look at my [Online Surviving the Addictive Love Cycle Program](#) here:

Visit [lovingtoomuch.com](http://lovingtoomuch.com) to Start Healing Now



Best Wishes,



Helen Mia Harris [www.helenmiaharris.com](http://www.helenmiaharris.com)

Helen regularly sees individual clients and couples for relationship counselling, therapy and her powerful "break-through" sessions. Visit [helenmiaharris.com](http://helenmiaharris.com) to find out more.