

Marianne has accepted an offer to spend her third year of college in Sweden. She'll be leaving in September and, depending on their plans for Christmas, Connell may not see her again until next June. People are always telling him he's going to miss her, but until now he's been looking forward to how long and intense their email correspondence will be while she's away. Now he looks into her cold interpretive eyes and thinks: Okay, I will miss her. He feels ambivalent about this, as if it's disloyal of him, because maybe he's enjoying how she looks or some physical aspect of her closeness. He's not sure what friends are allowed to enjoy about each other.

In a series of emails they exchanged recently about their own friendship, Marianne expressed her feelings about Connell mainly in terms of her sustained interest in his opinions and beliefs, the curiosity she feels about his life, and her instinct to survey his thoughts whenever she feels conflicted about anything. He expressed himself more in terms of identification, his sense of rooting for her and suffering with her when she suffers, his ability to perceive and sympathize with her motivations. Marianne thought this had something to do with gender roles. I think I just like you a lot as a person, he replied defensively. That's actually very sweet, she wrote back.