

ADDICTED TO DAVID

I THINK I LOVE YOU

by Allison Pearson
(Chatto, £12.99)

LIZ JONES

WHEN I finished reading Allison Pearson's new novel about what happens to a girl who grows up in south Wales addicted to David Cassidy, enters a competition to meet her idol but only claims her prize some 20-odd years too late, I went straight onto YouTube and watched her first love, my first love, in that white jumpsuit with the studs and the appliqué on the scrawny chest as he sat on the edge of the stage at Wembley in 1973 singing I Am a Clown in that girly voice of his.

I was in the audience that day – we were all so young the concert started at midday, I guess so we'd get home before dark – and watching the footage and reading this book made me remember what it was like to be in love, an emotion I've never felt since. I mourned for the girl with the sooty eyes and the Mary Quant moss nail polish in a homemade tartan smock with a white ruffled bib at the neck, whose heart was full of hope. If only I could reach back through time and warn her of all the endless dreary decades ahead. That is what this novel, I assume based very closely on Pearson's own childhood, is really about: how real life never quite measures up to a teenage crush.

Petra is dark, awkward, unpopular and Welsh (I like her already). She loves David, and dreams of the day she will meet him. She consumes *The Essential David Cassidy Magazine*, not realising the weekly letters from her idol are really penned by a young music journalist named Bill. Years later, clearing out her childhood home after the funeral of her cold and distant Wagner-loving and David-disapproving mother, Petra uncovers a letter telling her she had come first in a quiz to find the ultimate Cassidy fan. The prize: to meet the delicious man child himself. Now a middle-aged mum whose husband has copped off with

someone dimmer and slimmer, Petra rings the magazine's publisher to claim her prize. She is taken to Las Vegas to meet David by his ghost writer all those years ago. The story channels *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but not quite: we didn't really care what David had to say, we just loved the way he looked. The reason we loved his records was not because we loved his musicianship but because we imagined how that breathy voice would feel on our necks.

This book conjures up the early Seventies so perfectly I can almost taste the decade, smell it – the Trimphone and Green Shield Stamps and Cinzano Bianco and Anne French Cleansing Milk. This novel reminds me how innocent we were back then: there were no Wags, no SATC, no MTV or the Hills or Gossip Girl. We didn't have It bags, we had knitted square pouches with tassels. But most of all Pearson reminds me how delicious unrequited love actually is. Men in real life are never as beautiful, never as tender as David. They don't have feather cuts or cowbells round their necks but instead have dirty socks and weird smells and unspeakable habits and incriminating text messages nestled in the palm of their hand like a grenade.

I Think I Love You is better written than anything by Nick Hornby and his ilk: they like to show off, whereas Pearson seems almost ashamed of how clever and poetic she is. There will be some critics who will have wanted her, after that funny and accurate first novel, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, about super-busy mums, to have tackled a weightier subject, and a male writer driven by a huge ego – Ian McEwan, say, or Martin Amis – would already have abandoned childish things and tackled terrorism or global warming. But this book is about big things – friendship, motherhood, love, loss – seen through the prism of smoke from a joss stick, set to jingly jangly music that still makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up, produces a shiver not unlike that from a Fox's glacier mint, and makes me almost, but not quite, want to wet my pants.



Delicious man child: for young girls in the Seventies, David Cassidy was a god