

## It Isn't Love.

An early Saturday morning. Light seeping in through windows you forgot to cover the night before. A bed you don't recognize as your own. Pounding in your head, spinning behind your eyes, and a feeling of nausea in the pit of your stomach that lingers a little longer than you like. The covers feel heavy. Heavier than the ones you know you have in your room back in your college apartment. Scratchy sheets that you know you wouldn't put on your bed in a million years. A presence next to you that you know is not welcome. A night you try to piece together. A feeling of dread. Too many drinks and not enough hours of sleep. A realization. And then your world begins to crumble.

Growing up your parents showed you what a relationship filled with unconditional love looked like. It was spending early mornings together before going to work. Date nights at their favorite places. Cooking each other dinner. Taking care of each other when they were sick. It was listening to each other even in the heat of the moment when all they wanted to do was scream and cry. It was knowing that their love was strong enough to get them through the best and the worst times of their life. Witnessing this type of love since you were born makes you naive to think that all types of love are like this.

And then you meet a boy of your own. It's butterflies and nervous feelings in the pit of your stomach. Smiles that make your cheeks hurt. Laughter that makes you cry because you have never felt so content and at peace in your life. It's feeling like maybe this relationship is going to be the one that mirrors your mother and fathers. You spend all your time together. You can't get enough. It's him picking you up early in the morning so you don't have to drive yourself to school. It's changing the route you take to class so you can pass him in the hallway. Wearing his hockey jersey at his games cheering for him in the bleachers. The car rides to school dances, holding hands and blasting your favorite songs with the windows down. Introducing him to your parents. Looking at them and feeling so incredibly thankful that they have shown you the type of love that you deserve, and feeling like you have found that in the person standing next to you. It's saying you love each other for the first time. It's saying I love you every time after.

And then it hits a lull. The honeymoon period is over. You feel like you know this person in their entirety. The quiet peace of knowing so much about each other you can just coexist in comfortable silence. It's knowing that even if his acts of service and his loving words are beginning to slow, it doesn't mean he loves you any less. Because your mother felt the same way with your father after they dated for a few years. It's normal, she said. Until you feel a shift. But change is inevitable so you suppress it. It's normal. You've been together for so long. So you adapt. Because people do that for the person they love.

He doesn't want to go out with your friends so you go to his place. He thinks your clothes are showing too much so you change. He doesn't want you to text your male friends so you stop. He hates the place you want to go to for dinner so you go to his favorite place. He thinks your mothers relationship advice is flawed so you stop confiding in her. He thinks your feelings are dramatic so you suppress them. He thinks your friends are manipulating you to see the worst in him so you isolate yourself.

Because relationships require compromise. And you love him so you will do anything to feel the way you felt when you first met. To get that unconditional love like your parents have. Even if it takes breaking yourself down into tiny little pieces and molding them into the person he wants you to be, you would do it. Because it's love. Because he says he loves you. Because you think you love him. Until you realize that love is just a word he spits in your face to make sure you stick around.

It's love until he doesn't pick up his phone for days at a time. It's love until he cancels plans on you but won't tell you what he's doing instead. It's love until he sleeps with your best friend. It's love until he shows up to your house at three in the morning and won't leave until you speak to him. It's love until he refuses to leave you alone unless you give him another chance. It's love until he calls you a worthless cunt. It's love until he slashes your tires. It's love until he throws something at the wall near your head in a fit of rage. Its love until he locks you in his car and holds you down until you do things you said no to while you're screaming in tears. It's love until he threatens to kill himself unless you get back together with him, pretending to pop pills and suffocate on the other end of the line. It's love until you're curled up in a ball in your room sobbing thinking about where everything went wrong. It's love until he follows you to college without you knowing and tracks you down at a party you didn't know he knew anyone at. It's love until he locks you in a hotel room and does things you didn't agree to. It's love until you wake up the next morning and he tells you he assaulted you because you deserved it. Because he thought after you screamed and cried and begged for him to stop, you would realize you wanted it. That you wanted him.

It's love until you're laying in that bed. An early Saturday morning. When your head finally clears. It's a realization that even though you thought you loved this person beside you, they don't love you back. The feelings you have suppressed, the actions you have excused, the chances you gave, the trauma you have endured. It's the furthest thing from love. It is the complete opposite of what your parents have shown you for two decades. It's something your mother tells you on the phone nights later that someone who actually loved you, would never even consider doing to you.

It isn't love.