

CHAD EASTHAM

the

TRUTH

about



BREAKING UP,



MAKING UP,

& MOVING ON



chapter 1

SUPER SURE IT'S LOVE?

Love: a virtue representing all of human kindness, compassion, and affection.

—Merriam-Webster¹

To be loved is to be known, deeply, and we all want to be loved.

—chad

THIS ABSOLUTELY MUST BE LOVE . . . MAYBE

When you are a guy just starting college, already overwhelmed by everything new, you don't expect to run smack-dab into *her* the first week. *Her*. She was absolutely gorgeous, and I mean truly stunning, with crazy blue eyes, a wowing smile, and a super-awesome-looking face. Her name was Jen, but my brain immediately nicknamed her *dream girl*. (Also, ahead of time, this isn't *The Notebook* . . . sorry.) When

The Truth About Breaking Up...

I met her, Jen had on running shorts and a beat-up college T-shirt, with a pencil between her teeth. I don't think the pencil was there permanently—probably she was just studying. Of course, she was even prettier because she laughed a lot, and the only wrinkles on her face were in the corners of her eyes, the kind people get from smiling, which are the best wrinkles, in my opinion. Not only was Jen breathtakingly stunning (and still is), but she was also really smart. And she turned out to be really, really nice to talk to. She was super friendly to me, and all I did was be kind of quiet and try not to look like an idiot barely keeping it together. I remember thinking, *Wow, there really are girls like this in the world, even at my college, and right in front of me. They're classy and beautiful and fun and mature, all at the same time.* Then I thought, *Well . . . that's pretty awful news.*

Okay . . . to make sense of that odd thought, here was my next thought:

Okay, self, now you know there are girls like this in the world, which is terrible information to know. Because someone will get to date this girl and get looked at all sweet by her, kiss her, and probably marry her. Some guy will get to smell her and hug her and stare at her whenever he wants. Here's the bad news, self: she can pick anyone she wants, ANYONE. She'll probably get all wooed by some smart, rich, dumbface, handsome, millionaire guy who doesn't care about money but has a lot of it. He'll probably have a private plane that goes to his private island that probably has dolphins. This means that Jen, on top of being happy and smart and pretty and sweet, will most likely get to own and name and play with . . . pet dolphins. You can't

Super Sure It's Love?

compete with *dolphins*. On top of this, she'll probably tell this future jerk how special he is and brag about him to everyone at cool parties in neat places near the ocean. She'll probably even believe this jerk is special, but only because he most likely is special, and he's probably a jerk because he's not me.

Shortly after these punch-yourself-in-the-face thoughts, one of my friends decided to be extra cruel by telling me that Jen was saying nice things about me. A mean joke, most likely, I thought, so you can imagine my surprise when it turned out not to be a joke.

Jen did think I was nice and interesting, and this confused me greatly. Somehow, though, Jen and I hit it off. In fact, we hung out a handful of times and went on a few dates. We put futon chairs onto the roof of my dorm one night to watch a rare meteor shower, where we stared up at the sky all night and talked about life. It was an awesome night, actually. An incredible and beautiful girl just had a great time with me (which can greatly enhance a boy's self-esteem). But later, as I walked Jen back to her place on campus, that's when it got weird. She had a little look in her eye, and I kinda thought there was a kiss somewhere behind that look, maybe, lurking a little, or probably just me hoping. Because here was my inner monologue at that moment:

You did it, buddy. You didn't screw up. Good job, self. Now she's letting me walk her home. This is good. Okay, now wait. She's smiling at me and touching my hand. There's her door. She's slowing down. Wait, she touched my hand again. Accident? Messing with me? There's no way this girl wants

The Truth About Breaking Up...

me to actually touch her back. Why are her lips so amazing right now? Okay, wait . . . does she want me to kiss her? If I kiss her, and she lets me, I'm gonna freak out. There's no way she actually wants me to kiss her. But why is she smiling at me so much, then? Okay, self, according to all the movies I've seen in life, this is a scene where a girl might let a guy kiss her. Man, this is gonna be terrible if she . . . okay, wait . . . she's telling me now how much fun she had, and she's not backing away. Do it, idiot, just do it. Dude, listen to ME, it's YOU! Go, man! Move lips forward, take look of fear off face. Okay, here we go . . . this will probably end horribly . . .

Then I did it. I kissed her—the wow-ing, stunning college girl I never thought would even look at me. And she kissed me back. And I mean . . . it was a *really* nice kiss. The kind you see in movies, but without the music and film crew around. I started walking home in a daze, processing the new information about a world where a girl like that kissed me. Then . . . it happened. I felt it. It felt like . . . nothing.

Wait, what? . . . *nothing*? No fireworks, no soft music in the background. In all honesty . . . I just didn't feel what I was expecting to feel. And you know what? That's the stupidest feeling I might have ever had. Also, one of the most confusing. I thought I must be defective as a human being and a male, because who isn't deeply in love after *that* moment with *that* girl? That would be you, Chad, you idiot.

Here's the thing, though: I liked Jen a lot. I thought I liked her romantically, and I pictured what it would be like with her in a relationship and loved the idea. Plus, I couldn't believe she thought I was interesting enough to spend time with me, much

less let me kiss her. For several days after that, I just sat and thought, which was important, because apparently my brain was broken, very damaged or defective, and needed fixing.

Fast-forward a little to what I know about it now: while I didn't understand it at the time—and it's weird to admit this on paper—I really had idealized Jen. (You've probably already figured that out.) The thing is, in the story in my mind, I made Jen out to be perfect, and that wasn't fair to her. In reality, I was being selfish, but maybe not in the "traditional" selfish way. I wasn't looking at Jen for who she really was; I was using her to show how important I must be. How could I not be important if a girl like that liked me, right? I really didn't mean to do that; I was just young and didn't know a better way of thinking. I've never really apologized to her for that specifically, mostly because I didn't know how to apologize for my brain not working. I can't see girls being cool with . . . "Hey, sorry about my brain not working right; that thing is nuts sometimes. I know I might have confused you, but my brain confused me too. Anyhoo . . . just letting you know that was why! Hugs!" I mean, I'd be willing to try it once . . . but just for the story, really.

To my benefit, Jen and I stayed friends. It was actually fine after a couple of weeks. Mostly because she's awesome and is cool enough not to hold grudges about my confusion. It made me respect her more in the bigger picture. And now, I think it's insane that I only looked at her with the romance goggles, and I did this from the instant I saw her. To be blunt with myself, I didn't really see her at all. I saw who I wanted her to be *for me*.

I'll bet I'm not alone in that either. I think a lot of us make that mistake.


IN LOVE WITH LOVE

In hindsight, my real problem with Jen wasn't a problem with Jen at all. It was a problem with me. I wasn't in love; I was in love with being in love. Maybe you've done this too. Most people do this at least once, or a thousand times.


Why? Why do we do this? And how do we know when we are really in love . . . and not just in love with love? How do we know what love really is?

LOVE IS . . .

Love. We need it to live, just like we need air and food. Love connects human beings, and being connected—to God, to one another—is why we are here. Love is the best tool we have on earth. The best moments in life always seem to include other people, and usually it's us loving and caring and experiencing life with one another. At least those are my best memories in life so far.



Love is our true destiny. We do not
find the meaning of life by ourselves
alone—we find it with another.



—Thomas Merton

Love and romantic love are not the same, by the way. I think we should paint this on a wall a hundred feet high to remind ourselves. Romantic love is only a tiny, minuscule fraction of what *love* encompasses. If *romantic love* were a drop of water, the ocean it fell into would be the rest of love. But yes, for our purposes, people are mostly concerned with the romantic understanding

Super Sure It's Love?

of love. So let's talk about it. How do you know if it's really love? Because sometimes, as Marybeth mentions in her letter, love can be a pretty hard thing to make sense of:

Chad,

I had this boyfriend named Brent. I thought I loved him, and he said he loved me. But he would completely smother, control, and disrespect me. If I didn't answer his texts or his calls right away, he'd start blowing up at me or even come over. If I didn't pay for his meals, he'd say I was after his money, even though we only ordered off the dollar menus! He would say, "Why don't you wear short shorts, miniskirts, and string bikinis?" I told him it's because I'm modest, and I didn't like him saying this, but then he would get angry. How do you ever know if you are in love?

—Marybeth

To be clear, Marybeth is asking about love, but she's describing the opposite of love. This is probably confusing to someone reading her letter and even more confusing for Marybeth. *Love* is probably one of the most misused words in the history of . . . well, history. Why do people describe *fear* and call it *love*? Why do they describe confusion, control, disrespect, and heartache, yet call it love? No wonder life can be so confusing, especially as a teenager.

Love is probably one of the most misused words in the history of . . . well, history.

The Truth About Breaking Up...

So how do you know real love when you come across it? Well, for starters, let's look at a different letter. This actually *is* a love letter, even though it's only a few sentences long. And . . . it's different. It's from a young man writing on May 12, 1869, to a girl he intended to marry one day, expressing one way he thought about her:

Out of the depths of my happy heart wells a great tide of love and prayer for this priceless treasure [Olivia] that is confided to my lifelong keeping. You cannot see its intangible waves as they flow toward you, darling, but in these lines you will hear, as it were, the distant beating of its surf.

—Mark Twain to Olivia Langdon,
his future wife

Can you see the difference in how they view love? Marybeth's letter is filled with fear and confusion and stress, but the other shows gratitude and humility and selflessness. Guess which relationship I'd bet on? I mean . . .

LOVE'S IMPULSIVE COUSIN

Sometimes people in love . . . aren't. They just aren't. Meet *infatuation*, the impulsive and loud cousin of love. Infatuation looks like love, smells like love, dresses like love, but it is *not* love. Emphasis on *not*. So let's first be clear about what it is then:

Super Sure It's Love?

Infatuation is the state of being completely carried away by unreasoned passion or love. It “expresses the headlong libidinal attraction” of addictive love. Usually, one is inspired with an intense but short-lived passion or admiration for someone.²

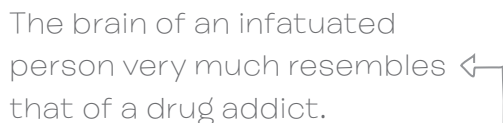
Infatuation isn't wrong, by the way. It almost always exists in the beginning stage of love. It's actually there for a reason—a good one, potentially. Here's why: when you are first interested in someone, infatuation allows you to look past people's small imperfections, which is important to do in order to want to get to know them more. There's nothing wrong with thinking highly of people, unless it's not accurate, and then it's, well . . . not accurate. I think when people truly fall in love, the infatuation fades away and is replaced with a deeper, more realistic, and less fantasized version of love. In real love, no one is perfect or idealized; instead, a person is appreciated and understood for exactly who he or she is.

Infatuation—to put it simply—makes people's brains go a little bit crazy. In fact, left to its own neurotic devices, and without proper boundaries and guidance, the brain of an infatuated person very much resembles that of a drug addict.

It's not infatuation that's so addictive; rather, it's the chemicals (like dopamine and serotonin and oxytocin) our brains produce when

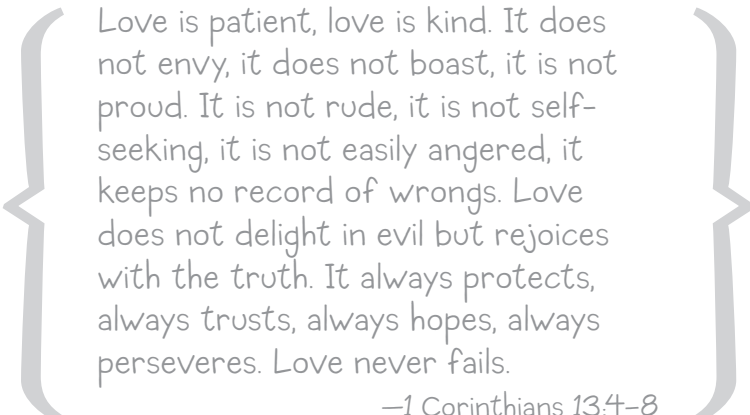
we are infatuated that people get addicted to. Infatuation happens quickly. Simply

The brain of an infatuated person very much resembles that of a drug addict.



The Truth About Breaking Up...

put, it's an overreaction to someone, when you don't have enough real facts yet to validate your strong feelings. Three areas of your brain swing into action: the *right ventral tegmental region*, the *medial caudate nucleus*, and the *nucleus accumbens*. The chemicals produced by these three areas work together to shorten your attention span, cause short-term memory loss, and impact your goal-oriented behavior. You get an adrenaline rush, your heart rate goes up, you have trouble focusing, and your thoughts can become fixated on the other person. In other words, your judgment becomes impaired. So it's easy to see why people feel overwhelmed by their feelings in a relationship. And when you understand *why* something happens, it changes everything.³



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

—1 Corinthians 13:4–8

While real love is patient, trusting, caring, gentle, pure, and not jealous, infatuation gets carried away by passion and leaves reasoning and thinking in the trash. Infatuation, after all, is like a drug that just happens to be legal.


Super Sure It's Love?

U R SIMPLY NOT RIGHT—4 ME


It's really difficult the moment you realize that someone just isn't "the right person for you," especially when you really thought he or she was. It can be hard to change the direction of a relationship when your mind has created a slightly different reality than the one that is currently smacking you in the face. Here's something you should know: the ability to start putting the childish version of love behind you and start looking at things more clearly and more truthfully is critical for life. It's part of growing up, and it makes your brain grow up too. There are many lessons to be learned about love. And one of the greatest of them is that infatuation is not the same as love. It never has been. It never will be.

THE LOVE CONNECTION

Love is connection. Our lives—our joy, imagination, and yes, relationships—are shaped by love or the absence of it. We need to be connected to other people, period. We need to be cared about and known by other human beings, on a deeply personal level. We also need to give this same deep sense of caring to others.



I have found that to love and to be loved is the most empowering and exhilarating of all human emotions.



—Jane Goodall

The Truth About Breaking Up...

Growing up, I didn't really understand much about God or the Bible, even when I tried. People at church told me that God is love. To be honest, it was hard for me to connect that idea with my everyday life. I didn't know what to do with "God is love"⁴ when I was sitting around my room on a Thursday night. What I did know was that I liked having friends, and I liked it when girls were nice to me, along with some other basic human likes and whatnot. It seemed logical that if a pretty girl liked me, and she was liked by a lot of other people . . . then maybe, by default or something like that, those other people might like me too. I wasn't even really looking for true love. I was looking for people who might like me, or at least not hate me. It's not fun when people hate you and don't love you, in my experience anyway.

Now . . . it's different, and I don't really think that way anymore. I have learned more about what the word *love* can mean since then, whether I meant to or not. I didn't always like the answers people gave me about God either, because they seemed . . . small. So I had to go and look for myself—and I still do—and it's one of the best decisions I've ever made for my faith. I do believe that God is love, *complete love*, and that his love becomes infinitely bigger and better when you stretch it from a newborn infant all the way to a universal scale. Plus, with string theory, there may be multi universal layers separated by patterns in dark matter vibration sequences . . . sorry, my bad. In other words, God is larger than measurement, and that means his love is also very, *very* big. Then there's the opposite too. If God is love, then that also makes love personal and more understandable . . . even

Super Sure It's Love?

on the smallest, tiny little blue planet speck of dust, human, personal, you level.

MATH AND LOVE

Chad,

I'm a pretty normal male teenager, I'd say. But somehow or another, I keep messing up relationships. Don't get me wrong, I've never really dated. But the reason for that is mostly because whenever I like a girl, she doesn't like me. I have a group of close friends, and I'm the only one in the group who hasn't been involved romantically whatsoever with anyone. Actually, I know a lot of people who have dated, and they're only around fifteen or sixteen. I feel alone and left out, like no matter what I do, I'll just keep getting shot down.

—Confused and Worried

Let's talk to all the "Confused and Worried" out there for a moment. It will help if we add some math to this love confusion. Start with some simple facts. In 2011, 134 million people were born. The United Nations estimates that there are just over 7 billion people alive today. That's 7 billion people sharing the trees, oceans, stop signs, food, and boy band music, which is less important than the other things.

The next bit of information will also not make you feel any better about love. Sorry. But then keep reading . . .

The Truth About Breaking Up...

99 PERCENT REJECTION IS AMAZING

What's the point of those people numbers? It's to put rejection in perspective. Sometimes the way we all think about rejection is just stupid. And even the math says so. For example . . . let's say that you are a girl, and you go on 100 dates with 100 different guys. Of those dates, 99 don't go well, at all (and many go horribly). How do you feel about this?

- ☐ really, really good
- ☐ super really not good . . . a lot

If you said "super really not good," then I have some bad news: you are terrible at math, and you are missing an important point about how many people might like you. So I'll explain.

If I told you that 99 percent of guys out there won't like you romantically and that only 1 percent of them would, you might start to feel a little depressed. Who loves a 99 percent rejection rate? But here's the thing: if only 1 percent of guys on this planet like you—*only 1 percent*—know what that means? To help you, it means roughly 35 million people of the opposite sex *will* be very interested in you, and that's with a 99 percent fail rate! And you know that more than 1 out of 100 people would like you on average, right? Let's say maybe you also smell really bad, so only 3 or 4 out of 100 like you. But you know what that means, Stinky? Over 100 million people would be interested in you! Who would get sad knowing that, on average, about 35 to 100 million people on this planet would be interested in them

Super Sure It's Love?

romantically, if they could only find the time to meet more people? Do you get this point at all? How we see things changes the things we see.

But how dumb are we sometimes? I mean that seriously too, because how many times do we focus on the rejection part of life? It's like we ignore all of the other acceptance and love in the world to spend time feeling the rejection of one person. That sounds pretty silly, especially considering tens of millions of people could like you, mathematically speaking.

LOVE IS NOT PARADISE

Two things are necessary for life: loving and being loved. But romantic love is different. Contrary to popular everything all the time, romantic love is *not* the "end all and be all" of life. Nor is it the only thing that will keep our hearts beating and smiling. There are lots of kinds of love: love of family, love of friends, and, yes, even self-love (in the non-perverted, healthy, balanced sort of way, of course). Romantic love can be wonderful, deep, and fulfilling, but here is what it's not: love is not paradise, nor is it meant to be. Romantic love should complement a well-rounded, meaningful life. It's not meant to be your whole life. People who act as though being in love is life usually also love listening to their heart and feelings. And if you're one of those people who's only listening to their heart and feelings, then maybe we should look at what you're really doing.

The Truth About Breaking Up...

FOLLOW YOUR HEART . . . TO BE MISERABLE

Follow, follow, follow. Just follow, baby, follow.

You just follow that heart . . . girl . . . yada yada.

Maybe these will be lyrics somewhere in a hit pop song soon, but here's why I don't like them, and I hope you won't either. Everyone tells you to follow your heart. *If you aren't truly listening to that heart of yours, they say, then you don't have a big heart.* These people also say sappy things like:

Follow your heart regardless of what others tell you to do.

Break the rules and stand apart: ignore your head and follow your heart.

Have the courage to follow your heart, and you'll know who you truly want to become.


The problem with that whole heart-following thing is that the people who love these sappy sayings the most should probably be listening to them the least. I'm sure that they're kind, good-hearted people, and good for them. But half the time they don't even know what these sayings mean. I know this because I ask people sometimes, and then it gets awkward when they realize *I know* they don't know, and that's why I was asking. My point is that people who throw these sayings around can unintentionally give themselves and other people absolutely horrible advice.

Just to be completely unromantic about it, I want to translate

Super Sure It's Love?

what "Always follow your heart," "Listen to your heart," or "Trust your heart" really means. For starters, let's look at it sarcastically; it's more fun.

So . . . the heart can't lead anything. It has to stay inside of your chest and pump blood to your body, mostly because it's just an organ in your body. In other words, if your heart is leading you, it's outside your body, and you're most likely dead. Also, that thing has absolutely no navigational skills, no GPS, and no wilderness mapping training. The heart also has no mouth (almost positive)—so it can't say anything for you to listen to. So what these kinds of sayings really mean is "trust in your pulmonary system," and that's really dumb advice for relationships.



While the world says to follow your heart, the Bible says you should lead your heart.

—chad



He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.

—Proverbs 28:26 NKJV

So what about all the "listen to your heart and follow it wherever it takes you" answers? Well, not every answer is a good answer. Are there other suggestions out there? Turns out there are. The Bible often says exactly the opposite of all the cutesy-heart-face-quotey-life-pics, even though I didn't know that for a long time. While the world says to follow your heart, the Bible says you should lead your heart. (And keep in mind, "heart" really means "emotions.") Here are a few quotes:

The Truth About Breaking Up...

- The heart is deceitful above all things. (Jeremiah 17:9)
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:2)
- Trust in the LORD with all your heart. (Proverbs 3:5)

Not only does the Bible often say the opposite of the “follow your heart” cutesy sayings club, but it also talks about the consequences for people who actually do follow their hearts:

{ There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
—Proverbs 14:12 }

The writer in Proverbs was actually talking about the danger of following your heart. Coincidentally, this perspective about being led by emotions and emotional confusion is right on par with Therapy 101. Actually, the Bible has a lot of common-sense advice, and I like that a lot. In case you didn’t know a little factoid, I like this one: the Ten Commandments—do not steal, murder, and so forth—all speak to the need for controlling our feelings and emotions so that they don’t control us. It’s the same message a good therapist would give you, just worded a little differently: recognize your feelings, use your brain, and *then* act accordingly.

To put it simply, we could benefit from “un-following” our hearts sometimes and trying to use our brains more—which we are supposed to be developing in very important ways right now anyway. It’s kind of like walking a dog. Things work out better for everyone when you lead the dog instead of it leading you. If you are devoted to the teachings of the Dog Training Emperor of the World, Cesar Millan, then you understand this.

So maybe both the Dog Whisperer and the Bible are packed with incredible life lessons. Thank you, Jesus Christ and Cesar Millan, in that order.

THE TRUTH OF THE MAGNET MATTER

Chad,

Hi, I have a kind of broad question. Why does love have to be so difficult? Why can't it be easier?

—Emilia

Honestly, that's a really simple but good question that Emilia asks. To understand it, we have to start somewhere else—at the beginning. That is, why are we attracted to the people we are attracted to? 'Cause it's not always for the reasons we think.

Here's the truth about why we are drawn to certain people, often without knowing it: If you are sad, you tend to attract sad people. If you are lonely, you tend to attract lonely people. And the weird part is that we usually have *no* idea that we're doing this, and yet these unconscious decisions shape a lot of our choices and directions in life. It means a lot of the hurt or rejection or silly relationships that you showed interest in last week, last month, or in your whole life . . . are really a reflection of you. It's not a coincidence that we are drawn to certain types of people or that we repeat the same patterns in relationships. It's not always easy to see this, but it happens a lot. I mean, there's a reason we have sayings like . . .

The Truth About Breaking Up...

It was over before it began.
Their love was doomed.
I saw that one coming.
They just weren't right for each other.
Like two doomed ships that pass in a storm.
They never stood a chance.

Why can't love be easier? Well, I don't know. That's a complicated question without one simple answer. I think love can be easy, but it's also a very complex thing too. Maybe instead of finding yourself heartbroken and then asking, "Why is love so difficult?" you should start more simply. Maybe with . . . "What is love?"

SOOO, WHAT IS LOVE?

How do people know if they're really in love and not just in infatuation? How does a couple know when they should get married and spend the rest of their lives together?

To be honest, I hope the question "Is this really love?" isn't one that you have to struggle with too often or too early. The reason I hope this is because it's a distraction for a lot of people, in very serious ways. There are real things that you need to learn and develop as a young person, and in your teen years, figuring out who you are and where you're headed is key. Inevitably, however, love will draw you in; you can't avoid it and shouldn't. But as you learn and grow and start to look for love, it's important to know what love is . . . and what it is not. To throw out just

Super Sure It's Love?

a few, here are some of the characteristics of actual relationships that are loving:

1. A loving relationship requires two people who feel the same way—or very, very similar—about each other. Just because “you are in love” doesn’t mean “we are in love.”
2. A loving relationship requires mutual feelings of care and concern, but it also commits to acting in a way that shows that care and concern.
3. A loving relationship requires availability, time, investment, and energy—from *both* of you. Love is not one person trying to make a relationship work. That’s unbalanced.
4. People in loving relationships experience joy, peace, comfort, and lower stress levels. If a relationship frequently causes stress and strain, then it probably isn’t a loving relationship.
5. People in loving relationships usually have common interests, goals, morals, and faith viewpoints. These similarities draw them closer as they experience more things together naturally through their interests.
Opposites may attract, but if one person only likes to ride bikes and the other person only likes to scuba dive, they’ll be living in two different worlds.
6. A real loving relationship helps people feel better about life and who they are in life. It gives them a sense of inner peace, not confusion and frustration. Real love says, “I love you, and I know how much you love me.”⁵

What I hope you discover about love is this: real love is very reasonable. Deep, romantic, kind, long-lasting, cherished

The Truth About Breaking Up...

love is very . . . reasonable. And you know what? That's not unromantic either; it just means more people are capable of it.

By the way, the whole "love as a reasonable and respectable relationship" thing doesn't sell well—just think about all of the dysfunctional reality shows that play off of love drama. A lack of seeing real love represented in the popular culture we consume adds to our confusion about it. Personally, I don't think love is supposed to be the crazy-dramatic roller coaster ride of life. That's what roller coasters are for. Love . . . is much better than that.