

Is This Love?

How to tell if what you're
feeling is the real deal or a
counterfeit

by Jule Kucera

Is this love
is this love
is this love
is this love
that I'm feelin'?

— Bob Marley

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Dedicated to all brave souls
who seek true love

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Introduction

When I first started dating Trent Price, I told him I didn't know what love was. He said simply, "I do."

What is written on the following pages is completely, amazingly, joyfully true. The large, gray 'handwritten' comments are things Trent really has said or written.

As Trent says,

True stories are the best kind.

This is love.

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They think you are beautiful.

You may not think so, but they do. When I look in the mirror I see curly hair, freckles, and lines that don't go away when I stop smiling or frowning. When I wake up in the morning, the curls have flattened all around my head except on top where they stick straight up. I wake up and look over and see Trent. If his eyes are open, he will smile at me and say, "Baby, you are so beautiful."

You only have to look beautiful to one person.

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They are happy to see you.

For a while, Trent and I both delayed coming home, because neither of us liked to come home to an empty house. We both wanted to come home to the other.

When I lived upstairs in my Chicago two-flat, from the kitchen I could see Trent's white Econoline van pull into the back parking space. I'd hear his steps come up the three flights of stairs, heavy from hard work. He'd open the back door and seeing me, his face would break into a broad smile, his eyes bright. Before we did anything else, we would hold each other. If it had been a hard day, he would ask, "Baby, can we lie down and hold each other?" We would go the bedroom and lie down in each other's arms. Dinner would wait.

My heart is so happy
we could both dance around inside it.

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They watch out for you.

I am writing this at Trent's dining room table, in his house that has just been sold. He's out at the barn, loading up pieces of scrap metal that need to be gotten rid of before the new owners take possession. When his nephew Matt calls, I walk the phone out to Trent. It is a chilly, blustery day and the wind cuts through my (his) sweatshirt. As Trent talks to Matt, he has his eye on me, and he moves to place himself as a windbreak to protect me. It is a small gesture. It is huge.

I feel like I could pick you up and carry you anywhere.

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They tell you the truth.

At the first significant conversation I had with Trent, he pulled out his keys and thumbed through them until he came to the picture of his daughter. "This is my daughter," he said. "Her name is Jenna. Jenna Jo Price." He did not hide her or wait until we had three dates. He wanted me to know the truth from the start. He tells me the truth, even when he knows it is something I might not want to hear.

As long as we keep loving each other
and telling each other the truth,
we're going to be alright.


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They are what matters.

Before Trent, before my first marriage, I had a list of qualities I looked for in a man. I don't remember them all, but a few were:

 Charming

 Intelligent

 Funny

 Handsome

 Athletic

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If I am being honest, there were also unwritten requirements related to position and income. Let's just say that list didn't serve me so well.

The second time around, before Trent, when I was dating dating-service men, I wanted to be clear about exactly what I wanted from and with a man. This is my list and I know it by heart:

-  Kindness
-  Integrity
-  Laughter
-  Passion
-  Tenderness

When I shared this second list with Jenna she said, "Strange list." Strange maybe, different certainly, but it is a list that has brought me a man that has made me happier than I ever thought possible.

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Kindness

My grandmother's china has had a wild ride. She enjoyed hosting large dinner parties and one of my favorite memories is being able to sit at the big people table and eat from her fancy china. When she died, her sons split the china between New Jersey and Nebraska. Thirty years later, when my uncle in Nebraska died, I rescued his half from the trash and reunited it with the rest at my mother's condo in New Jersey. Last summer, my mother sent the china off in the car with Trent and me. When we got to Chicago, it went into the basement because I had no place to put it.

When I came home from work one day, there was a beautiful antique china cabinet sitting in my dining room. The cabinet was over five feet tall and just as wide, with glass doors and a large mirror behind the shelves. The dark mahogany glistened as it waited for my grandmother's china. Trent was not there.

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The china cabinet got to Chicago on the back of Trent's truck, in a special crate he built to fit the cabinet to the truck and hold it carefully on the ride from Battle Creek to Chicago. Trent got his friend Bob to help him load the cabinet into the truck, drive to Chicago, carry the cabinet up the back stairs, and then drive back to Battle Creek. It was an endless day. Bob is a farmer who agreed to help Trent in exchange for Trent helping bale five wagonloads of hay. Baling is hot, sticky, miserable work and Trent doesn't like it at all.

I had never told Trent about wanting a china cabinet. He knew I loved my grandmother and that her china was in the basement. Kindness is made of thoughtful acts.

Love is stronger than anything, even titanium.

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Integrity

They tell the truth. They do what they say they are going to do. They keep their word. They stick to their values even when it is difficult. They face up to their responsibility and accountability. When something goes wrong, they don't make it your fault.

Jenna has had her father to herself for most of her life. Her parents split up when she was four. When her mother went back to school, her father was her fulltime caregiver. He fed her when she was hungry and he was not. He built her a maze for a school project, even though the project was primarily an excuse to get a pet mouse. He built her a fort. He taught her to drive an ATV. He took her on a driving trip through Michigan with Hermione, her pet turtle, and once backtracked several miles to a stop where they had inadvertently left Hermione behind. Trent belonged entirely and completely to Jenna. And then I showed up.

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Naturally, Jenna wished I would go away and let her father know that. She liked me, but she didn't like the changes I was causing. Her father sold his truck and got a van, because it is illegal to park a truck on the streets of Chicago overnight. He put the house where Jenna was born on the market. He kissed me in front of her. He told us that he loved us both, and that he wouldn't stop loving either of us.

I wouldn't even let my daughter change my mind. There's nobody else left.

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Laughter

This is not the laughter of being entertained by someone who is good at telling jokes. This is the laughter that comes from being in a situation and seeing the humor of it, from finding joy in each other and in your life together. Sometimes it's "if we don't laugh, we'll cry" laughter. Sometimes it's "I can't believe they did that/said that." Sometimes it's laughter from not taking sex too seriously—some of our biggest belly laughs have been in bed. This laughter makes your stomach muscles hurt and makes you both feel good. (It's no good if only one of you is laughing.)

Our lives are going to be a fantastic ride. And we're carpoolin'!

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Passion

You enjoy sex. You feel safe in their arms and safe being naked before them. In that safety and heat you let down your defenses and explore and enjoy each other, in all your grasping and release. You touch and let yourself be touched, you know and let yourself be known. This is intimacy not just of two bodies, but of two souls.

Seventy acres lie behind Trent's barn. One day Trent asked me to hop on the back of his three-wheeler because he wanted to show me something. There was a place where ancient trees had grown sideways and become overgrown with vines. It looked like a tree cave. Trent had raked and swept the floor and made it ready for blankets. Outside the tree cave, he had carved a table and two chairs from the massive branch of a walnut tree. He called it "The Love Shack."

There isn't an inch of you that I
wouldn't kiss, lick, hug or love.

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Tenderness

Trent is a big guy and his hands are rough from years of work with lumber and concrete. But those callused hands hold me so gently when he plays with a curl at my forehead or pulls a coverlet over my shoulders. Sometimes I feel like a teacup or a kitten. I know I am safe in his hands.

Early in our relationship, Trent and I stood in the Chicago kitchen, holding each other. I asked, “How can you tell if someone loves you?” I wasn’t being coy—I was completely serious. He took a few moments to think about it and then answered, “I think you can tell by the way they hold you.”

I wish I could wrap you up like a cocoon so I could hold you from all around and be loving you. Then you could be a butterfly every morning.

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It's easy to be with them.

Two summers ago, Trent and I planned a car trip from Chicago to the east coast and back so he could meet my parents and brother. I was nervous, not about him meeting my family, but about us being together in the car for all that time. We hadn't yet fought, and I was sure it would happen on the trip. But it didn't. We got lost but we didn't fight. We got in a lengthy road-construction traffic jam but we didn't fight.

We talked and listened to music and made plans. We stopped when either of us needed to. We enjoyed our time together. It was easy. Doing laundry together is easy, grocery shopping is easy, paddling a tandem kayak is easy, it's all easy. Being apart is hard. Being together is easy.

I enjoy you when you're here and I miss you when you're gone.

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You're better together.

Trent and I are together now. His place in Michigan is sold. So is my place in Chicago. We moved our things to a new place where neither of us has ever lived that we both like a lot. He's not on 80 acres anymore, he's on 20. He doesn't have a barn, he has a 2 ½ stall detached garage. I'm no longer getting my mail at the front door, it's a quarter-mile walk down a gravel road. I'm not taking the train to work, I'm walking downstairs to the office Trent built for me. We both left the lives we were familiar with and the places we loved for a new place and a new life together. We are a little bit scared and a lot in love.

When I lie in his arms, I know we are going to be fine. We believe the best about each other and bring out the best in each other. We are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that fit together lots of different ways. I stretch his mind. He stretches my heart.

In the days when we were traveling back and forth to each other's place, any day we weren't together, we would talk on the phone first thing in the morning and last thing at night. One morning when I was in Chicago and he was in Michigan and we had already had our morning talk, I got into work to this message on my voicemail:

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Sweet baby, I just talked to you.
I love you so much.
Baby, the love I have for you is so
huge you can't see it in one day.
So I'm going to show you a little piece
of it every day for the rest of my life
and there's going to be so much left
that you'll see it for eternity.
I love you.

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Epilogue

Our first date was in October 2003. We moved to Newaygo, Michigan in March 2006. Trent left the planet on Wednesday, September 17th, 2008, at a little after 7:00 p.m. He was outside, and the last thing he saw was blue sky and his favorite pine tree, lit by the setting sun.

The medical examiner who did the autopsy explained that Trent had a thin spot in his heart, and it tore. The doctor called it a 'dissection of the aorta.' He said even if it had happened in an ER, there was nothing anyone could have done.

I miss being able to see Trent, to touch him, to laugh with him, to love him, to be with him. But I know he still loves me, and I him.

*Our bones and our flesh will be gone,
and we'll still be loving each other.*

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To know more about Trent and Jule's story, pick up a copy of [*Sweet Baby Lover*](#), Jule's memoir. To get a tiny story from Jule in your email every Sunday, join in at julekucera.com.