

What's love got to do with it, everything!

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Literary essay

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love

By: Raymond Carver

An excerpt from Readers Digest August, 1997, submitted to Laughter, the Best Medicine, by Adam Christing.

A lot of people wonder how you know if you really in love, says comedian Ronnie Shakes. Just ask yourself one question: Would I mind being financially ruined by this person?

If you really look at this statement, it is invariably the truth. When it comes to love, money makes no matter, be it past, present or future. Love is love, and nothing can stand in its way.

In the following pages I will be discussing Raymond Carvers short story, What We Talk About When We Talk About Love. It is a story that explores all types of love, jealous, brutal, physical and spiritual. Written in 1981, it is very contemporary in its style and its meaning can be applied easily to everyday life.

Only love that is true in your heart is love, the rest are other emotions sublimated into love. With this in mind, we should look at people around us, people who are in love. Ask to yourself, Why are they in love? Then, ask yourself, How are they in love? It may be surprising, but the answers to these questions can be surpassingly different. Only when they are the same will the love be true.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, is set in a house somewhere in Albuquerque NM, some time in the afternoon or early evening, and going into night. As previously stated, the story was written in 1981, and it appears to set in the same time. Two couples are sitting around the kitchen table, drinking gin, and talking, talking about love and the many forms it takes. Teresa (Terri) gives a detailed description of a brutal love she had with her ex-boyfriend, and how he beat her. Mel, Terris husband, gives us his feeling for his ex-wife, and how he loves his kids, that she has custody of. Jealousy, is the love he has for her, she has his children, and he wishes her dead, so he could have custody. Finally, the love they all agree as the universally truest love, the spiritual love, is shown by an elderly couple involved in a bad accident. Both of them refuse to die, until they can be assured the other will be all right.

In the very beginning of the story, the two couples are sitting around drinking and talking. As their conversation goes on it develops into one of love. This passage marks the first of several types of love, and gives us an intuitive view into the psyche of Terri.

Then Terri said, He beat me up one night. He dragged me around the living room by my ankles. He kept saying, I love you, I love you, you bitch. He went on dragging me around the living room. My head kept on knocking on things. Terri looked around the table, What do you do with love like that.

The abusive relationship, is a very common type of love. This is the love that is primary brought on against women. They stay in a relationship with a man, even though he constantly beats her. Some stay out of fear, but many truly love the person and are not masochistic. The reasons for this are numerous: The woman truly loves the guy, and hopes he will change. She knows that he loves her and is unable to show it in another way. The fear of being alone.

All of these are common reason for tolerating an abusive relationship, and none are bad reasons in themselves, but when physical violence is coupled with them, a dangerous, and most likely a repeating, situation is developed. Women who are involved in abusive relationships, typically are always involved in them, be it emotional, physical or mental abuse, the cycle continues. Terri, is now involved in another abusive relationship, not physical, bur mental with Mel.

Jealousy, a feeling so evil two of the Ten Commandments expressly forbid it. As we look at Mel, a cardiologist, a person whose job it is to save lives, desires to have his ex-wife dead. Towards the end of the story Mel gives his feeling on his ex-wife, and his kids.

I think I want to call my kids, Mel said ... Terri said, What if Majorie answers the phone? You guys, you've heard us on the subject of Majorie. It'll make you feel even worse. I don't want to talk to Majorie, Mel said. But I want to talk to my kids....She's allergic to bees, Mel said. If I'm not praying she'll get married again, I'm praying she'll get herself stung to death by a swarm of fucking bees.

In these lines, Mel is proclaiming his love for his children, but at the same time, showing his hate for his ex-wife. In essence he is contradicting himself. He loves his children, but hates half of what, and who, they are. He has taken his love and sublimated it into hate, a vicious hate, that he would be willing to kill over. He is jealous of her; she has control of his kids.

How can children, of a divorced set of parents, be expected to cope with parents like that, being told to love them, when they have such a high level of hate between themselves? They are being told to do one thing, and then they see those who told them to do it, doing the opposite. How can a parent expect to set a good standard for their children like that? They cannot, they are teaching it is all right to hate, if you tell others they are to love.

Approximately two-thirds of the way through the story, Mel, gives a detailed description of an old couple involved in an accident. This in itself is not significant, but the portrayal of the love between the two is. In this story, that Mel is telling, he explains what kind of love he most desires, a spiritual one.

.. Casts and bandages, head to foot, the both of them. You know, you've seen it in the movies. That is just the way they looked, just like in the movies... Well, the husband was very depressed for the longest while. Even after he found out that his wife was going to pull through, he was still very depressed... It was because he

couldnt see her through his eyeholes. He said that was what was making him feel so bad. Can you imagine? Im telling you the man's heart was breaking because he couldnt turn his goddamn head to see his goddamn wife.

The man could not see his wife, that was his only concern, was to see her and be assured in his heart that she was going to all right. That is what love really is. All that matters to him is his wife, not himself. He may have given up the will to live, inside all of those bandages, but he kept going, just so he could see her. That is kind of love that I think anyone would want. That love is an undoing commitment to each other.

In all people the capacity for that kind of love exists. It is only realized, if the two people feel that way towards each other. They would do anything for the other one, even if it meant death, or hang on to life just a little bit long, to make sure the other was all right. All that they had to keep them going was love, spiritual love.

As I stated, only love that is true in your heart is love, the rest are other emotions sublimated into love. Many people do find this true love and sometimes they are the only one in the relationship that feels this way. In others, the love felt is true, but fear may mask what people are actually feeling. If that is the case, the two people may never find their love for each other. The question to ask oneself, to find out if one is really in love, is, Will I do anything for this person, even if it means giving my life to save him/her? If that question is answered yes, then, in my opinion, the love is true. Look at people who have been married for a long time, look at the way they look at each other. If they truly love their partner, it will be seen in their eyes

