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The Talbots

## CAN THIS BE

# LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

Read this column and learn the answers to the important questions:  
Does he really love me?  
Can I really trust him?  
Am I better off without him?

Recently I've been concerned that this column might be criticized for tackling only the petty questions regarding relationships between men and women (like the proper way to tell a man that if he ever again informs a table of dinner guests "There won't be any leftovers tomorrow because Bette sneaks into the refrigerator at night and eats them all," you will strangle him with his own tie). So here are the biggies, the whoppers, the bottom-line questions, along with guidelines for figuring out their answers.

### 1. Does he really love me?

The answer is yes if:

He spends several hours one afternoon helping you look for a present for your mother's birthday and, when you ultimately don't buy anything, refrains from calling you "a basket case."

He says you look beautiful even after

you've just singed off your eyelashes trying to serve him flaming bananas for dessert.

He laughs indulgently at the amusing story about how you happened to lose his wallet.

The answer is no if:

He wonders why you've never tried to "slim down."

He breaks a date with you because he has "an early-morning dentist appointment."

He follows another woman with his eyes and then says to you, "I'm sorry, what did you say?" when you didn't say anything.

### 2. Do I really love him?

The answer is yes if:

You think he looks adorable trying to adjust the picture on the TV screen wearing nothing but his socks.

You find endearing his habit of leaving used Q-Tips in the most surprising places.

You elect to spend an afternoon with him at what he describes as "a really interesting demolition site" rather than use your one-day-only pass for a free facial and massage at Elizabeth Arden's.

The answer is no if:

The way he meticulously folds his napkin at the end of each meal makes you want to stuff it down his throat.

When describing him to others, you no-

tice a look of growing horror in their eyes.

You'd pass up a chance to go browsing through a jewelry store with him, in favor of seeing the slides of your aunt and uncle's cruise to Bermuda.

### 3. Is he serious about the relationship?

The answer is yes if:

He suggests that you join him on his next vacation, which he's planning for the summer of '86.

He solicits your opinion of a couch he's contemplating buying and, when you tell him brown and orange houndstooth check wouldn't be your first choice for a restful living room, he doesn't buy it.

The answer is no if:

He compliments you exuberantly on your apartment and, unasked, advises you never to give it up.

He takes the opportunity of a friend's marriage ceremony to whisper in your ear, "There goes another log down the river."

On the first anniversary of the day you met, he lifts his glass of wine and toasts you with the words, "Here's to more fun and frolic in '84."

### 4. Can I trust him?

The answer is yes if:

He's late for an appointment with you because he had to take a lost dog to the ASPCA.

He asks you to make a call for him and lets you look up the number yourself in his address book.

He has to go to Las Vegas on business, and you see him packing a large volume entitled *A Guide to the Cactus Formations of the Great Southwest*.

The answer is no if:

He breaks a date with you because he has to take his Uncle Moe from Sun City out to dinner, and then you see that night's credit card receipt from someplace called "The Fantasy Lounge."

Everytime you answer the phone in his apartment, the same woman's voice says, "Sorry, wrong number."

He says he's going to be very busy at work and can't see you for a while, and then turns up two weeks later with a deep tan and plastic poppit beads in his pockets.

### 5. Am I better off without him?

The answer is yes if:

When you're with him, you don't feel quite as smart, pretty or talented as the majority of women in your part of the state.

You feel less comfortable with him than you did at your ninth-grade dance.

You question the motives behind everything he tells you, including the time.

The answer is no if:

When you're separated from him, you feel more or less the way you did when they told you that your pet turtle, Timmy, had been found dead behind the radiator.

Being with him makes you believe that you and Candice Bergen actually do have a lot in common physically.

You think about him more often than you think about all the things you're going to eat when you go off your diet.

Perhaps your questions are more specialized than these—like, "Why does he have his mother's picture hanging over his bed?" If that's the case, I'm afraid you need more help than this column is prepared to give.