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Love is hearts with initials and last names scratched in a notebook. Love is holding his hand for the first time and feeling the rush of butterflies. Love is a first kiss, where noses bump and awkwardness overplays romance. Love is lying in bed with him and listening to his heart. Love is fighting over stupid things and making up an hour later.

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Love is confusing. Love is not knowing what is going to happen from day to day and making the most of it. Love is keeping secrets from family members to keep up appearances. Love is trying to keep yourself occupied when he doesn't come home for hours. Love is appeasing him no matter what the cost.

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Love is a busted lip smeared with blood that goes unreported. Love is bruised knuckles and holes in drywall. Love is screams that echo through a house that has never been home. Love is heavy breathing from a one night stand before going home to you. Love is angry hands and thrashing in a bedroom to get what he wants from you. Love is you not wanting to hurt him, no matter what he does to you.

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Love is death. Love is a trap that keeps you from finding your own way. Love is a loss of freedom. Love is something you no longer believe in.

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Love is a new beginning. Love is getting over the fear and learning to trust. Love is having faith in a dream. Love is smiling until your face hurts. Love is finding comfort and safety in yourself. Love is having patience with limits. Love is feeling the flutter return. Love is there every day.

To fully understand what love is, you must first discover everything it is not.

*Tabitha Albright*