

SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

By ROBERT MARRIOTT

The French have a word for it—"amour." Context and voice inflection determine whether "like," "love," or some sentiment in between is the intended meaning. The French, essentially romantic people, who have been called a nation of lovers, need this word and use it frequently. The English probably don't miss it at all, but the American youth, who tends to be in love, or almost in love, most of the time, is often stumped for a word to express himself at those times when "like" is not enough, and "love" is too much.

We are either a nation without a word, or with one word too many. What the young American needs is a short caressing word to bridge the chasm between "like" and "love." Picture a young couple after a Spring dance headed toward their private world of romance. As Don's convertible glides quietly into a tree-guarded niche overlooking the stream, the headlights blend for a moment with the half moon, mirrored in the water. After turning the key in the ignition and adjusting the dial on the car radio, he flicks off the lights.

"College should be like this all the time," he says, glancing up through the leaves at the white May moon.

Don stretches casually and slips his right arm over Joan's shoulders. His left rests on the cool metal of the door. Slowly, but eagerly, Joan slides across the smooth leather seat, content in the tender affection of the moment and anticipation of more passionate moments to follow. One arm encircles his neck; her eyelids close out the moonlight. The carefully chosen "mood music" filtering from twin speakers flavors the evening's first kiss. The song ends and reluctantly they pull apart. Leaning her blond head back against the seat, Joan captures the depths of his brown eyes in the blue of hers and breathes in the faint night perfume.

But the myriad thoughts and emotions exchanged by their eyes are not enough for Joan, who feels the need to put her feelings into words.

"Don," she murmurs, her eyes still holding his.

"Yes, angel?" He feels the sense of urgency and importance in her voice.

"I *like* you so much!" With this inspiring declaration she again throws her arm around his neck, pressing her cheek to his chest.

Exerting an admirable quantity of self-control, Don resists his first impulse to throw his companion over the hood of the car and into the creek. He even suppresses a desire to take this nincompoop back to her dormitory, and eventually convinces himself that at least she meant well by her declaration. (Don is obviously a model of self-control.) But the magic of the girl, the moon, and the music is gone and won't be recaptured this night.

The evening is ruined but whose fault is it really? Taking for granted the popular notion that no woman can go for very long without saying something, it was inevitable that Joan should try to put her feelings into words. Her miserable failure can be attributed to the absence in our language of a word for the emotion she feels. Should she have murmured, "I love you?" No! To her these words have too much meaning to be lavished on a suitor who is important in her present life, but who, she knows realistically, may be replaced in a few weeks by another boy equally appealing. Who could criticize her for holding love precious enough to give only once?

The point is that neither "love" nor "like" even approximate the meaning Joan wished to convey. We like ice cream; we like dogs; we like summer. These things we like and these things we may even like "so much." But a young man and a young woman in each other's arms don't want to feel like ice cream, dogs, or even like summer—and the "so much" only added a ludicrous note to an already ridiculous tune.

So here we are in a country which seems to delight in coining new words such as Miltown, orlon, dacron, Dixiecrat, and anahist, but in a country also hamstrung by an inability to express the universal feeling of fond, passionate attraction which may exist between two people. Perhaps in time someone will find a word for misguided Joan, who said the wrong thing, and tongue-tied Don, who found it better to say nothing at all, and left his partner as frustrated by his silence as he was by her senseless "I like you so much!"