

Michael Exner

I know water balloons are pollutants. When broken, they lay plastic down in the earth like seeds, planting toxins instead of life. But when I was younger, water balloons were just a way for me to annoy my relatives, tossing them while they unpacked on the first day of my camping trip. I caused mischief like that until suddenly, I was dripping wet. Someone else had thrown a water balloon at me. I turned around and saw her. Maybe my age, grinning at me. That was all that mattered. She was camping too, and leaving tomorrow. We threw plastic at each other all day. I never learned her name.



I still love water balloons.

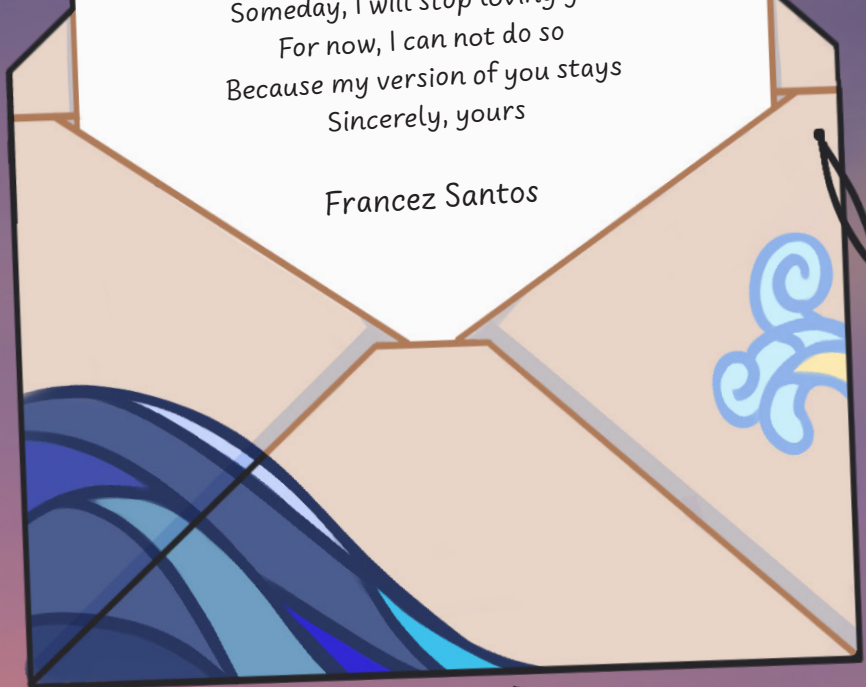
Forgive me again for watching you from afar
I think that your smile must bond me like strings
The way you don't care what anyone else says
The way you aglow with such a passion
Wherever you may be,
I am astray for your affectionate love

Love is like a thousand words in letters
And these words are for you
To love you upon the last drop of ink is my desire

My valentine, my universe
Your hugs are subtle music and wishes combined
Your eyes leave a gateway to the heavens

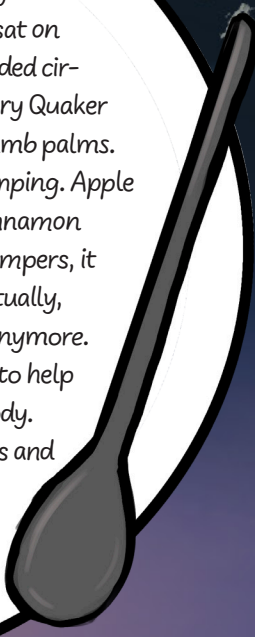
Someday, I will stop loving you
For now, I can not do so
Because my version of you stays
Sincerely, yours

Francez Santos



The crisp morning air bit
our noses, cheeks, and fingers pink. My
mom, dad, sister, grandma, grandpa and I sat on
a menagerie of camp chairs arranged in a lopsided circle.
We clutched styrofoam cups of that watery Quaker
Instant Oatmeal, warming our nearly numb palms.
We only ever ate it when we were camping. Apple
cinnamon, maple brown sugar, cinnamon
spice; to us freezing, starving campers, it
was as good as ambrosia. Eventually,
my grandma couldn't camp anymore.
I baked her oatmeal muffins to help
"bulk" her chemo-thinned body.
We savored the buttery cakes and
remembered.

Adele Ryono



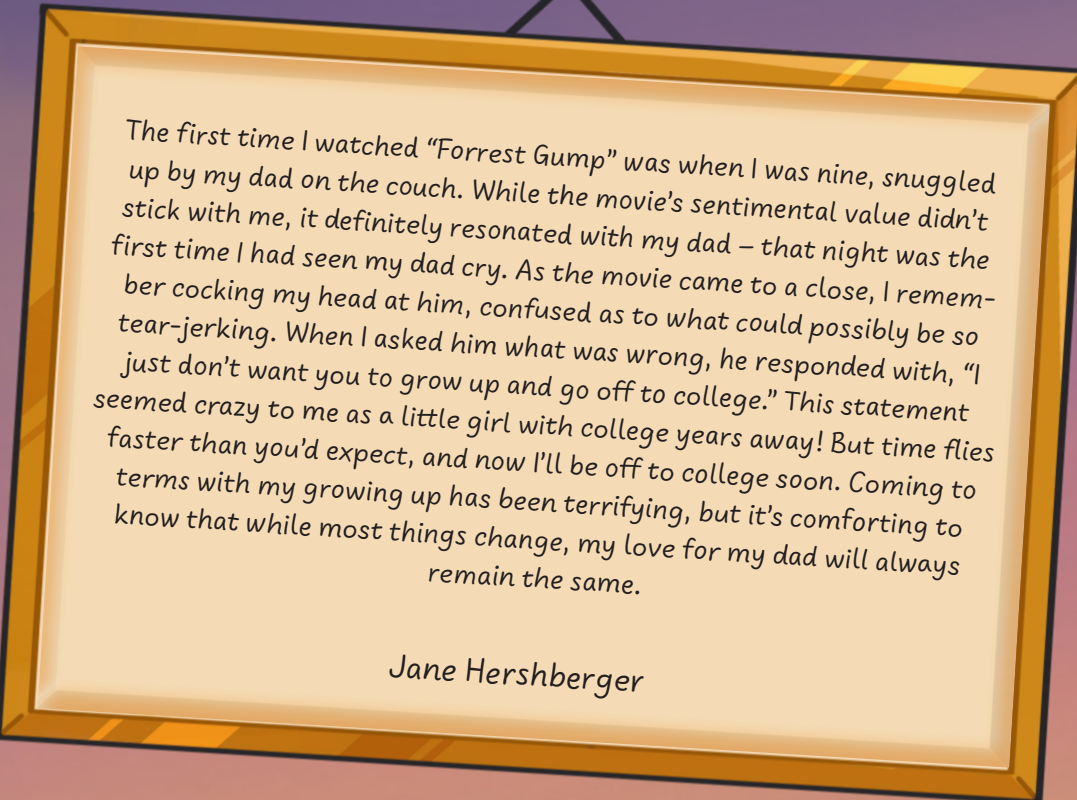
Though strangers in Spanish class, we knew more than enough about each other. I thought it was weird to watch Mukbang videos and sleep to the sound of people munching, but for her, it was better than listening to the teacher. We sat far away from each other and never said a word to one another. I thought she was the prettiest, from the first day she entered the classroom. But I wasn't the only one, so it was over—I tried to move on, but a surprising text the following year got me thinking again. "You're the guy who listened to Lamp in Spanish class?" It turned out to be true, everything fell into place, and we both knew, just how long we'd been waiting for that moment, a simple interaction.

Jose Callejas



The first time I watched "Forrest Gump" was when I was nine, snuggled up by my dad on the couch. While the movie's sentimental value didn't stick with me, it definitely resonated with my dad — that night was the first time I had seen my dad cry. As the movie came to a close, I remember cocking my head at him, confused as to what could possibly be so tear-jerking. When I asked him what was wrong, he responded with, "I just don't want you to grow up and go off to college." This statement seemed crazy to me as a little girl with college years away! But time flies faster than you'd expect, and now I'll be off to college soon. Coming to terms with my growing up has been terrifying, but it's comforting to know that while most things change, my love for my dad will always remain the same.

Jane Hershberger



I used Minecraft to confess to my crush. It was very cute and really cheesy. I planned out the entire thing, a candle path leading to a picnic on a beach and a signed Minecraft book containing my confession. I wasn't sure if they'd like it, I was afraid of being too cheesy or too romantic. The plan was to give them the book in Minecraft, but they had the wrong version. So instead, I had them read it off of my computer while I played with their dog. I think it worked. I got myself a boyfriend.

Sammi Hollandsworth
Emma Jensen



More stories online!

It was my first sleepover with my best friend. My rock, my reason, my chaos. It'd been the best thing ever, we stayed up till five in the morning cackling, drunk on sugar. People don't usually clean each other's rooms when they come over but it was something we did together and we bonded, we were closer than before and she made me feel real. She is the life of my party, when she shows up, the only rule is to be chaos. We spent the extreme early hours talking about our futures. I looked at her, at her smile, at her loving arms, and I knew I wanted her to be part of it.

Mya Nguyen



Tiny Love Stories

The Fair
Rosalind Lumos

I remember that day
The crisp, cool weather
The excitement we felt
Finally seeing each other
After so long apart

The county fair
A celebration of fun
The crisp summer breeze
The way you touched my heart

We walked around for awhile
Hopping on every ride we could find
Not playing any games
Cause we didn't want to be fined

Eventually, it was finally time
To get off the rides
And eat together on the grass
The wet, cool, grass.
There were no tables left
But who cares about that?

We talked about whatever
Life, gossip, interests
Your new name and face
The other ways we've changed

I talked about my family
How they think I'm so pretty
And asked you, my friend
"Am I really?"

"I think you're pretty"
You told me...
With no hesitation
It wasn't hard to believe you.
There was no lie in your words.

You were genuine and true.
I could tell that you were.
And now whenever I feel
Down about myself
I think of your words.

I realized, then
I am absolutely gorgeous
All because of you,
My beloved friend.