

A Life of Love – Finley, Year 10, QLD

Zero; They are infants really. Babbling constantly and full of cries that sound to the heavens but still a long-lasting friendship is kindling between boy and girl. Not much is said, no real words are uttered and yet both share the simple understanding that the other is someone they trust, someone they care for, someone they love.

One; Girl and boy have learnt to stand on their own two feet. They step and step and step and step and step until their feet will not carry them any further, yet those little feet never leave each other's sides. The pair are inseparable; Two peas in a pod despite the apparent differences between them. They still love.

Two; New hairs sprout upon the heads of the children, new words leave their small lips, new toys grace the houses that they call home. The children grow and flourish tremendously, blossoming from seedlings to sprouts. This is a stage in their lives full of excitement. And still there is love.

Three; Boy is up to mischief, causing a ruckus everywhere he sets foot. Girl has learnt that screaming gets her what she wants, her vocal cords are stretched to their limit this year, but she remains contempt. Although they are finding themselves more and more different as time goes on, boy and girl remain the best of friends. Love is still shared.

Five; Some time has passed. Deep into the mischievous toddler ages, the children rejoice at each and every victory over their parents; Pull his hair, throw that food, spill that water, pinch that kid, cry and cry and cry. The nonsense does not stop. Children will be children, boy is a boy, girl is a girl, yet they still love.

Eight; They're growing up. Getting taller seemingly by the day, they'll be baby giraffes in no time. Something's amiss between boy and girl, almost a disconnection, their internal Bluetooth has turned off and they are no longer hip to hip or hand in hand. Although they no longer share that overwhelmingly deep connection, they continue to love one another.

Ten; Boy has spent many days showing off his humungous muscles to all the other girls and letting them ogle. Girl is off in her own world most days, painting pretty pictures and singing sweet songs to herself in her spare time. As they mature from sprouts to sprigs with luscious leaves, becoming a vibrant green, their lives diverge slowly. They walk their own paths and make their own decisions. It is a lonely year for the youthful, but some obstacles must be faced alone in order to truly succeed.

Twelve: For a brief period, everything seemed like a warm summers' day with the sun beating down on your tanned skin. The fluffy and cozy blanket wrapped around your torso and the hot chocolate you drank when the snow beat down on the windows outside. It was blissful. Now? Now it was bitterly cold, so cold your teeth would chatter down as loud as drums. What had happened? What was going on with boy and girl? Why are they so different now? Even they wanted to know.

Sixteen: Delusional. That's what society would call her. Or maybe confused. Yes, confused was right. There is no way that someone like girl was like boy. Boys are boys and girls are girls and that's final. Boys worked hard, worked out, worked up the life ladder. Girls, they... they didn't do that! They were not strong, they were not powerful, they were not boys and there is nothing they could do to change that. It's just better that way! And so... she conformed. What happened to love?

Eighteen: Life is hectic. She is an adult now! It's all go go go and do this and do that. She has no time for fun, she cannot be a kid again. There is no time to relax, just school and work and money and stupid taxes like adults do. If she knew it would be this stressful, she would have savoured the peace in being a clueless and rambunctious child, unbeaten by Earth's societal standards. She is still she though. There is no time for love.

Twenty-One: At 18 life was hard, it really was. But at least she has one... kind of. She has her husband who provides her with a lovely home and tasty food. She has a wonderful little son that is full of smiles and giggles and another bundle of joy on the way. She is all set. What more could she want?

... A break? Her life is full of love, but at what cost?

Twenty-Five: Things are much different now, last time boy was in the picture was 9 years ago. Boy is now the whole picture, engulfing the entire thing in masculinity and a deep sense of power. With this newfound energy, boy ventures into the world of politics. His opinions are fiery and fuelled by rage, fighting for the benefit of many minorities under his wing. Although the blood flowing through boys' veins is no different than girls in the last 9 years, he feels far different than her, much more empowered. Boy feels human again, boy feels strong, boy is a boy. Boy loves differently but not less.

Forty-Five: The incessant beeping of a heart rate monitor had become his worst nightmare. Their worst nightmare. Girl and boy had spent the last 6 months almost entirely in hospital together with Stage III Lymphoma. After years of repressing themselves and their love for each other, this scary diagnosis and process was their breaking point. They could no longer live a lie, not with their husband, not with their kids, not with themselves. They wanted to fight. Both the cancer and the way society made them hide away. They needed to love what they had left.

Eighty-Five: It's been 40 years since they were sick. 40 years since the constant hospital visits, since all the raw and painful memories were made over what was supposed to be their death bed. They recovered after 2 and a half years of intense chemo and radiation as well as 2 surgeries. They have learnt to love their identity together, leaning into both their masculine side and their feminine. Painting their nails, shaving their head after growing it out for a wig company, they went sky diving and to Disney World and they attended their favourite bands' concert. Every happy thing they had on their death bed bucket list was achieved except for 1.

Dying while feeling complete. It was the last thing they had to do together to finish their beautiful dance of love.

Ninety-Two: After everything girl and boy have been through rest is just what they needed. To lay down one last time and never have to endure again. Every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year. All of it was for them to learn, and to grow, and to end up here. Together. Happy. As one. As the light crept closer and closer in their final living moments, eventually engulfing their every atom, together they walked towards it. Taking every stride hand in hand. There was love that would be shared for eternity.