

CHALLENGE

Robert Fulghum is the author of a book called *True Love*. The book is a collection of true love stories that ordinary people told him. How did he collect these stories? He sat in coffee houses in Seattle next to a sign that said, "TELL ME A SHORT LOVE STORY AND I WILL BUY YOU COFFEE AND MAKE YOU FAMOUS." The sign always drew a crowd. Once a crowd gathered, Fulghum encouraged people to tell their love stories. He wrote down the best stories and published them in the book. Here are two love stories from Fulghum's book. He says these stories are even better when read aloud to someone you love.

Read the love stories.

◆ Flowers

You wanted really short love stories. This one's long but small. I go to the Pike Place Market in Seattle almost every Saturday morning to shop and carry on a love affair.

For several years, I've bought flowers from a youngish woman who is a refugee from one of the hill tribes of Indochina. For one thing, she has the freshest and most beautiful flowers. For another, she is a fresh and beautiful flower herself. I don't know her name, nor she mine. We don't speak the same language. To her, I must be just another customer.

She is spring to me. She's there with daffodils, pussy willows, and then irises. She's summer, with roses and sunflowers. She's fall, with dahlias and chrysanthemums. As the growing season comes to an end, she brings stems of fall leaves to sell, and then it's over. In winter, I miss her.

When we exchange flowers and money, I always try to briefly and slyly touch her hand.

I always insist she keep the change, and she always insists on giving me an extra flower.

Once I tried to buy all her flowers at once, but she just shook her head no. I don't know why. Maybe she, too, is in love with someone and wants to be there to sell him flowers when he comes.



◆ Peanuts

This is really my mother's love story. I asked her to tell you, but she's too shy. It's too good not to pass on. It explains why my brother and I say we owe our existence to peanuts.

When she graduated from high school, my mother had everything going for her but one. She was pretty, smart, and came from a well-to-do family, but she was terribly shy—

especially around men. Boys didn't like to take her out because she was so quiet. She went off to the same college her mother had gone to, and, to please her mother, she agreed to join her mother's sorority. At the first sorority party, she sat out of sight at one end of a room in a corner by a table that had snacks on it. She ate a lot of peanuts out of nervousness.

Reading (2)



She began to notice a waiter, who seemed to be as shy as she. He never said anything, but he was taking care of her. He kept her glass filled with nonalcoholic punch and kept her peanut bowl full. From time to time, their eyes met and they smiled at each other.

When the dancing started and the party got rowdy, she walked into the kitchen and out

the back door to escape. As she was going down the alley, she heard someone calling, "Wait, wait, please wait." It was the waiter, running down the alley after her with a paper bag in his hands. They stood in awkward silence, just smiling. Then he reached into the bag, pulled out a whole can of peanuts and offered them to her and said, "I only wish these were pearls."

He ran back up the alley and into the sorority house.

Well, one thing led to another.

Twenty-five years later, on the silver wedding anniversary of my mother and the waiter (my father), he gave her a sterling silver jar marked "peanuts." She thought that was the gift and was really pleased. But there was more. When she lifted the lid, inside was a string of pearls.

No gift ever pleased her more. She wore those pearls as her only jewelry for years. When my father was killed in a traffic accident, she put the silver peanut can in his coffin with him. I've never seen her wear the pearls since. I think I know where they are, but I'm too shy to ask.

Choose one of the following writing activities.

1

Imagine that the flower seller in the story "Flowers" speaks a little English. With a partner, write out a conversation between the flower seller and the customer. The flower seller should speak six to eight times, and the customer should speak six to eight times. Practice the conversation with your partner. If you would like, read it in front of the class. One person plays the part of the flower seller, and the other person plays the part of the customer.

2

In the story "Peanuts," the waiter runs after the young woman and gives her a can of peanuts. He says, "I only wish these were pearls." With a partner, continue the conversation between the waiter and the young woman. Write six to eight lines for each one. Practice the conversation with your partner. If you would like, read it in front of the class. One person plays the part of the waiter, and the other person plays the part of the young woman.

Reading (3)

How did your parents meet?

Have you ever loved someone from afar?

What is the best love story you have read or heard?

What is your favorite love song?

What is your favorite movie about love?

Is there someone from high school you would like to date?

What would you like to say to the man who buys flowers? (page 10)

What do you have going for you?

When has one thing lead to another in your life?

Which story did you enjoy more?