October 12, 2021
From The New York Times

Tiny Love Stories: ‘An Idyllic Trip to Salvage Our Romance’
Modern Love in miniature, featuring reader-submitted stories of no more than 100 words.

His Daily Email
There’s a stretch of Highway 17 that runs from Hardeeville, S.C., to Charleston, where raspberry-colored azalea bushes dot the road in spring, peach jam and boiled peanuts sit in stands in late summer, and Gullah artisans sell their sweetgrass baskets year-round. This span of highway also marks the geographical distance in my marriage. To bridge the expanse, Mike sends me early-morning emails; he has done this every day since we met nine years ago. When I read his messages, I think of us: Two people, two hours apart, awakening for the same love.
— Deborah J. Cohan

Expecting the Unexpected
My mother left to find herself when I was 6, and again when I was 12. The second time, she didn’t come back. My father raised me in Queens while she was in an ashram in Oregon. Only in recent years have my mother and I grown close. People ask me how I could ever forgive her, how my family can gather over the Shabbat dinner she cooks us every Friday. Maybe it’s because I never gave up wishing. Maybe it’s because I believe all of us can change. My life has taught me to expect and embrace the unexpected.
— Ronit Plank

Holding Me Still
I heard a clink — actually, three. That’s what I most remember about the moment I fell in love for the first time. On a roller coaster in Ohio, 500 miles from my New York City home with someone I had known for only two months, I was terrified as we clink-clink-clinked toward the sky. Then I saw Michael smiling and heard an unexpected sound: the quiet roar of my 36-year-old heart finally letting go. He reached through the bars and took my hand. Gravity dropped us, but he held me still.
— Mark Jason Williams
A Stud for My Husband
Before my Taiwanese parents would visit, I would ask my husband to take out the silver hoop earrings he has worn nearly every day since he was a teenager. My parents are quite traditional, and this small gesture respected how they viewed gender expression. On their most recent visit in 2019, my mother pressed a small sapphire stud into my hand. “Your dad picked this. It’s for Kort.” They had seen old pictures and knew Kort’s ears were pierced. For 14 years, we had never spoken of it. But now, we could stop pretending. They love us as we are. — Shin Yu Pai

Our Final Weekend
Recently I saw my former boyfriend, roommate and best friend in Brooklyn's Fort Greene Park. We reminisced about our final weekend as a couple, including the ungodly Lincoln Tunnel traffic and hours of overly curated podcasts. As we arrived in Tivoli, on what was supposed to be an idyllic trip to salvage our romance, his phone dinged with a book delivery notice: “Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples.” Months later, sitting in our old spot in the park, we burst out laughing at this small moment, at everything that we couldn’t be for each other. — Rebecca Zimmerman
Our Fragile Bonds
Having nearly lost my marriage, I appreciate its comforts now: the quotidian rituals, the seamless care of our children, our shared warmth under the covers. But we both have unexplored pain. After all, with children, jobs, bills, laundry and yard work, who has time to feel all day? I sometimes worry that he will hide an addiction from me again, and he wonders whether someone could pull me away once more. Our marriage is somehow more solid and also less. We both know the fragility of such things. — Danielle Simone Brand

‘That Damn Dog’
My father died in a home gas explosion in México after I moved to Miami. I fell into a deep, dark hole. One day after drinking, I faced what I’d been thinking: What if nobody can love me as my father did? Papá never wanted to change me, never questioned my sexuality or personality. At home alone, I began to suffer so much that I contemplated suicide. “I want to be with someone who loves me unconditionally,” I said aloud. Right then, my dog walked over and stared at me. Canijo perro, that damn dog, I owe him my life. — Sergio Mendoza

Where You Began
I place a finger on the globe to show my daughter where I grew up. My finger covers most of Missouri, including my hometown, Maryville, which of course isn't marked. Maryville is in the center of the country, slightly to the left, like the heart in my body. People ask “Where are you from?” to learn where others began their story. Maryville is modest but has taught me to be authentic. (There are few secrets or pretenses in a small town.) My daughter’s hometown is Los Angeles, but Maryville exists within her, because it exists within me. — Shanda Connolly

Tan Lines From Different Lives
I told myself I wouldn’t look at your Instagram. But here it is: Your shirtless torso in the most recent picture you posted. Peeking out above your shorts is a tan line made from memories without me. You didn’t stop living when we broke up. I felt like I had. Looking at my own body in the bathroom mirror, I see that that’s not entirely true. I also have tan lines from memories made without you. What a gift that even when you’re broken and crying, you can still go to the beach. — Megan Gilbert
Comfort Object
As a child, I clung to the pillow my mother made me. When I lost my first dog and my grandfather, I hugged it as I rocked with pain. When I got engaged, I smiled into it, feeling it could sense my joy. When I left my family home in Mumbai as a married woman, it went with me. Over the last 38 years, my pillow has changed covers, houses and its cotton. But my affection and my mother’s dedication remain unchanged. Any time my pillow threatens to fall apart, my mother lovingly recreates its stitched stability. — Faye Remedios
MODERN LOVE

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From The New York Times

‘A Very Happy Devil’
A shy, uncomfortable Devil fidgeted at the Halloween party, anxious to go home. Newly out at 38, Devil believed a monkish life would be her future. Suddenly, a beautiful blond dressed in black jumped into view. “Who am I?” she asked, black gloves framing her face. (The only lesbian in the world for me? My one chance to find love in this new life?) “Shadow,” she said, laughing. Devil sat tongue-tied. By night’s end, she decided to take a chance. Twenty-seven years later, Shadow is still the only lesbian in the world for me, a very happy Devil. — Cathryn S. Cushing

What's Always Understood
When she calls, my mother, Geetha, speaks to me in Malayalam, a South Indian language. She occasionally mixes in English words to ensure that my wife, Kristin, from the American Northeast, gets the gist. Sometimes I translate; sometimes they manage on their own. Last month, my mother learned that she had lymphoma. She is now too tired to mix in English words. Kristin holds my hand and listens while my mother and I talk in our native tongue during her chemotherapy sessions, sharing in one of the oldest languages of them all: love. — Sambhu Pillai

‘Outrageously Perfect’
The first time my son wanted to wear a dress to school, I worried. Still, I hugged him and watched as he, brimming with style and courage, lined up for second grade. There wasn’t much teasing. His friends asked the few bullies, “Why shouldn’t a boy wear a dress?” Now, he no longer wears those dresses. New obsessions consume him: baking, Teslas, skin care. Last weekend, we mixed a custom nail polish that he named, “Raspberry Rose.” We painted our nails and admired ourselves, but mostly I admired him, wondering at my luck that this outrageously perfect child is mine. — Alyson Shelton

A Happy Failure
After four days of unwelcome offers and requests (one man asking if I could get him a job), I decided that online dating wasn’t for me. I deleted the app from my phone but failed to close my account, so one more email slipped through. Rimhel’s dad jokes and his love of ’80s music made me laugh, his green eyes were kind, and he too was divorced with children. I sent him my number and deactivated the service for good. Lucky me that my failure at technology let my future husband slide right into my DMs. — Susie Emmert