



from

first

words

to

forever



i love you
hope you like
your flowers

Gemma
Flores



It started with a scribble. Then a folded piece of paper. A text so short it barely counts as a sentence. That is how we started. Two sixteen year olds with tiny words, two sentences at most, afraid that writing too much might just make things feel too real. We were kids pretending we weren't kids, pretending we knew how to love someone without making it obvious how terrified we were.

My boyfriend and I met when we were in high school. It felt just like a movie, I walked into the room, saw him, and knew I wanted him. "Sara" by Fleetwood Mac on repeat for hours, scrolling trying to find his socials, and building up the courage to talk to him. That's where it all started. Then junior year came around. I kept seeing him everywhere. That to me was like a sign from some sort of strong force telling me to shoot my shot because *you lost him once. You can't lose him again.*" And I did just that.

When we would meet up, we'd give each other small gifts. The first "letter," if you even call it that, was from him—a folded up piece of construction paper. Written on it "I love you." If I could count the amount of letters me and him have exchanged between each other, wow, I sure would be writing all day and of course, I cannot have you be here all day.

In all honesty, I didn't expect these letters would end up being a collection for the whole world to see. In fact, I thought they would just stay in the white box I have under my bed full of the artifacts of our relationship. Seriously, if you look here, it's basically an archive. These letters are just...us. Two kids trying to figure out how to care about someone without ruining it. Two teens who kept handing each other pieces of our spilled hearts tucked inside notebook paper. We wrote to each other because it felt safer than speaking out the words that were clouding our head. We wrote because sometimes the only way to tell someone you love them is to put it on paper...along with a whole bunch of xo's.

I didn't know then that those small words would turn into pages. And that those pages would turn into...history, a history filled with messy handwriting, inside jokes, song recs, late-night apologies, and dreams so big we weren't sure if we were allowed to let them linger on a piece of paper for the other person's eyes to see. Looking back, I think these letters, the messy writing made us who we are today. At first, the letters are shy, and oh my God, you can absolutely tell. Quick sentences, rushed handwriting, words so scratched out the paper nearly tore. But somehow, in a blink of an eye, we unexpectedly, quietly, and beautifully grew stronger. Suddenly we're writing entire novels to each other. Literally, 10 page letters about appreciation, the future, and hopes and dreams. Ten page letters about absolutely nothing and everything at the same time. As if writing more meant holding onto each other longer.

There is something funny, I think, about how love ages and how it changes without warning, especially young love. One second you're sending texts that say "see u soon!" and the next you're planning the dog you'll adopt someday, the apartment you'll share, and the color of the bathroom walls... Why bathroom walls specifically? I don't know but my best guess is being on an intense sugar rush with Starbucks coffees and no curfew. But as our imaginary future expanded, so did our words. Our handwriting steadied, letters got longer, and voices grew braver. And our love that we were so scared of labeling it "love" at the beginning became real.

Even now, I can trace our growth through our pencil strokes. The early letters looked nervous, jumpy, full of eraser marks, "I love you!" and "I miss you." The ones in the middle looked more

hopeful, full of “thanks for paying yesterday’s dinner,” and “P.S. Did you finish your civics homework?” The later ones looked like us, just people learning how to be honest, how to forgive, how to dream out loud. Now, our letters contain “can’t wait to start our future” and “what car should we buy together later on?” Looking back at these, I giggle a bit. Not because of the language we used back then, but because of how much we’ve grown. And that’s it. That’s what this book is made of. Not just the perfect letters, but the real stuff. The pages we only dared to write at night when everything felt honest and easiest. We *have* grown into the newer, and might I say, better version of us.

So when you read through them, you’ll see the shift from short to long, simple to layered, from “I like you” to “I can’t wait for our future to start.” This book isn’t a guide to love, the “Love Book 101.” It isn’t a perfect story either. It’s just proof that writing changes people. It changed us for the better. Made us closer. Writing was a tool that gave us a new language to express our true feelings. It became our safe place.

And so, somewhere between the scribbles and the essays, between the first note and the tenth page, writing became our way of saying “I choose you.” “I love you.” Even when things get hard, we get tired, and life feels too loud, messy, and confusing.

It’s ironic how these letters are just love letters, that for me, feel almost fictional in a way. People say “Just call or text him,” but I say “no” as I grab my pen and paper and write to him. I just think there’s something more intimate about writing a letter and waiting for it. If I am dramatic then so be it. Something romantic about knowing someone sat down, thought of you, and gave you their time in ink is truly much more.

These letters are our world where our emotions didn’t rush but lingered. Letters are just that. Worlds. Worlds that teach us how to express, forgive, apologize, listen, laugh, and dream bigger. My letters, your letters, our letters teach us how to grow up without really growing apart. They aren’t always pretty. Sometimes it’s dramatic, messy. Full of scribbles and tears and whole paragraphs we erased and rewrote and erased again. But most of the time, they are real. Real love. Real love is a mix of imperfection, awkwardness, vulnerability, and of course, late night conversations that last until the next day. The real love two teenagers wrote about.

And now, they’re here. In your hands, reader. Out of the box under my bed, notes app, text messages and the tiny and quiet world we call ours.

Before you flip to the first letter, let me give a quick thanks...and a reminder. But first thanks. Thank you to the one who inspired me to make this collection. My person, my world, my first and forever. Thank you for writing me these letters. And for writing back in general. You’re the reason why these letters are here and in the hands of many more to come. Hopefully you see this and cringe, laugh, or maybe get embarrassed at the words we exchanged, and the words we should’ve said. This book is ours just as much as our memories are.

Now, a reminder. These pages don’t behave. They’re loud and soft at the same time. They argue with themselves. They reveal things I didn’t even understand until I saw the words again. And I got to say, wow...I was really out there surviving coffee, Taylor Swift, and that pen that always ran out of ink when I wanted to be serious in my letters. Despite that, that is the exact reason as to why I keep them. Every letter feels like life is slowing down when you read them. A reminder

that even when life is too big, we are still allowed to be small and allowed to say “I’m sorry” or “I miss you.” That is the reason why I am sharing them because of the proof that two people can fumble their way toward love and still make something beautiful out of all the confusion. That can still say “I’m here” and grow their love even more.

So read them gently. Laugh at the parts you feel like you should laugh at. Maybe roll your eyes a bit. Cry or hold your breath. You do you. Remember that our letters were never meant to be impressive, they are meant to be honest. Be kind to them. They held us once. Now they’ll hold you.

So here it is...our story. Our nostalgia, hopes, and two-years-and-counting experiment in loving each other the best we can.

If young love is messy, dramatic, hilarious, and magical... then these letters are exactly that.

Welcome to our beginning.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gemma Flores is an English major at UCCS who plans to attend law school because if she's going to argue, she might as well get paid for it. *From First Words to Forever* is her first collection of personal writings, born of her love of storytelling and obsession with saving every meaningful message she never wants to forget. When she's not writing, she's probably crafting, journaling, or eating and laughing with her boyfriend.

What do our words reveal about relationships over the years?

Across two years of letters, From First

Words to Forever follows a teenage relationship from its fragile beginning to its strongest moments. These real messages capture everything: missteps, confusions, growth, and the slow building of trust.

Together, they form a portrait of two people learning to care for one another, learning to love, and communicate. This

collection shows how even the smallest words can last forever.