

OUR PAPER HEARTS EVER

Paper hearts. In a multitude of colours. I had seen them strung up on the walls as decor by my aunt at some sort of bridal party. I asked then, who? Who had folded the hearts, precise pleats and symmetrical sides. Origami hearts, strung up on a string thin enough to never catch the light. My aunt had answered, with the indifference that an adult shows to a child whose words were white noise to the ears, that it was all “store-bought”.

I felt quite betrayed then, childish for a child with romance tinted thoughts. I was so sure somebody spent their time and effort into those paper hearts. Each perfect crease methodically folded down with enough love to stamp fingerprints onto the paper with their sweat as ink. I had thought all paper hearts were like that, authentically crafted to the point of perfection. Yet each heart, chained together with plastic wire, dangling in front of my eyes, only looked faker by the second.

Are all our paper hearts store-bought?

I had always considered hearts to be like paper, cut out red card held to our chests with masking tape. Everyone's heart seemed just like those store bought ones, straight lines and rounded corners. I thought mine was like that too, until I actually In a world full of perfect paper hearts, why was mine made of cardboard?

I had hoped, that hoped turned to desperation, that I would be just like everyone else. I would meet another just like me and both our paper hearts would be strung together for the rest of time. I wasn't foolish to think i'd get it first try, no one gets it on the first try.

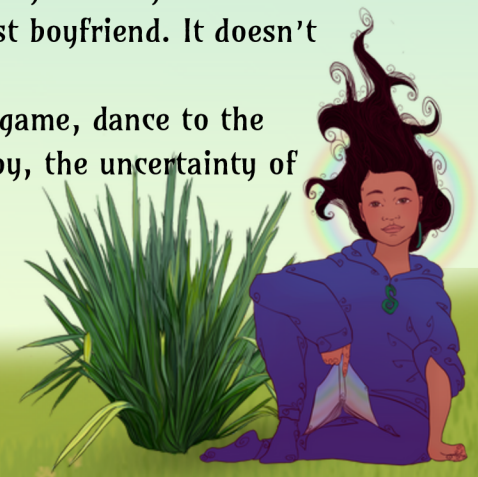
However, Time and time I had watched, on yellow slides and red monkey bars as crushes were asked and responded.

Given and received.

I decided to give it a go, picked a boy that I knew, and danced along. I was good at dancing, and I was so sure I could improvise my way into my first boyfriend. It doesn't matter

that I don't blush, or giggle, or stutter. I knew I had to play the game, dance to the music just like everyone else was. I wanted the experience, the joy, the uncertainty of feelings, even if I never really had them.

Is this what it's like to have a genuine paper heart?



I had wondered if someone could accept my own paper heart. It wasn't made of paper, not really. But it was close enough. I had coloured it in too, the same beating red as everyone else's, cut it open to get the pigment to bleed through. It was then sometime during primary that I had finally heard back an answer. A responder to my asking. It was quiet, unnoticed, fragile. The paper heart of my best friend was carefully placed into my hands on one dark sleepover night. We had been cuddling, as girls tend to do, we had been all over each other- legs twined and faces slotted into place between the crooks of shoulders- unlike what girls tend to do.

I choked it up to close friends, after all my cardboard heart didn't bleed red like hers did. It did not beat any quicker, not when she ran her calloused hands on my stomach for warmth, not when she told me she liked girls. Not when she had so vulnerably placed her paper heart in my hands, hoping to string our hearts together.

"I... I like girls and boys. I'm bisexual and I like-"

"Oh! Well I'm ace..."

"..."

I hadn't realised then, caught up in the moment just before, as the truth spilled out of my mouth. I hadn't realised that she loved me, and that I was a beat too quick to her confession. However, I knew deep down at that moment I couldn't love her the way she wanted me to.

Only some time later, I would realise I wasn't capable of loving, just like everyone else did easily. No matter how much I tried.

I had grown to accept it, despite my yearning to dance with everyone else. To see their bright colours that I only could imitate. I want my first kiss, my first teenage sweetheart, my first date. Yet in the end it's the experience of those things that I truly pine for. I had only wished that my cardboard heart was made of paper.

Just like everyone else's.

